

Child Protection Interventions in the Philippines – A Scoping Review

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Doi <https://doi.org/10.55640/ijssll-05-02-02>

ABSTRACT

This scoping review systematically maps the existing evidence base on child protection initiatives and interventions in the Philippines. Recognizing the critical importance of safeguarding children from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence, this study aims to identify, characterize, and synthesize the available literature on child protection policies, programs, and their implementation within the Philippine context. Utilizing a comprehensive search strategy across multiple databases, the review examines diverse types of evidence, including research studies, policy analyses, and program evaluations. Key areas of focus include the effectiveness of intervention programs for children-in-conflict with the law (CICL) and child abuse survivors, the implementation of child protection policies in schools and local communities, and the awareness and responsiveness of various stakeholders. The findings reveal a growing body of localized evidence, highlighting both strengths in policy frameworks and persistent challenges in their consistent and effective implementation. This review identifies significant gaps in the evidence base, particularly concerning rigorous impact evaluations and the generalizability of findings, underscoring the urgent need for more robust, evidence-informed research to strengthen child protection systems across the archipelago.

Keywords: Child Protection, Philippines, Scoping Review, Evidence-based, Intervention Programs, Policy Implementation, Child Abuse, Juvenile Delinquency.

INTRODUCTION

Child protection is a fundamental aspect of human rights and a cornerstone of societal well-being, encompassing measures to prevent and respond to all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation against children [1]. Globally, millions of children remain vulnerable to various threats, necessitating robust and effective protection systems [2]. In the Philippines, a nation with a large and youthful population, child protection remains a critical concern. Despite a comprehensive legal framework, including Republic Act No. 7610 (Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act) and other related policies, the country continues to face significant challenges in safeguarding its children [3, 4]. Issues such as child abuse, neglect, exploitation, child trafficking, and juvenile delinquency persist, often exacerbated by socio-economic vulnerabilities, cultural norms, and systemic limitations [5, 6].

The effectiveness of child protection efforts hinges significantly on the availability and application of evidence-

based approaches [7]. Evidence-based child protection involves the systematic use of research findings to inform policy development, program design, and intervention strategies, ensuring that resources are allocated to initiatives proven to be effective in achieving desired outcomes [8]. While the concept of evidence-based practice is gaining traction globally, its application within specific national contexts, particularly in developing countries, requires careful examination of locally relevant data and research [9]. Understanding what works, for whom, and under what circumstances in the Philippine context is crucial for strengthening child protection systems and improving outcomes for vulnerable children.

Despite the recognized importance of evidence, a comprehensive overview of the existing research on child protection in the Philippines is lacking. Individual studies often focus on specific aspects or localized interventions, making it challenging to ascertain the broader landscape of evidence-informed practices. A scoping review, a systematic approach to map existing literature on a broad

topic, is therefore an appropriate methodology to identify the extent, range, and nature of research activity in this field [10]. This study aims to conduct a scoping review to systematically map the evidence base on child protection initiatives and interventions in the Philippines, thereby identifying key themes, prevalent research designs, and significant gaps in the current body of knowledge. The findings will provide a foundational understanding for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to develop more targeted, effective, and evidence-informed child protection strategies across the country.

Literature Review

Child protection is a complex and multi-faceted field, drawing upon various disciplines including social work, psychology, law, public health, and education [11]. International conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), provide a universal framework for safeguarding children's rights, including their right to protection from harm [12]. These global standards underscore the imperative for nations to establish robust legal and institutional mechanisms to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect.

In the Philippines, the legislative landscape for child protection is relatively comprehensive. Key policies like DepEd Order No. 40 S. 2012, which outlines the Child Protection Policy in schools, demonstrate a commitment to creating safe environments for children [13]. Studies have explored the extent of implementation and compliance with such policies at the school level, indicating varying degrees of effectiveness [14, 15]. Similarly, at the local government unit (LGU) level, particularly in barangays (villages), the efficiency of local police and desk officers in responding to child abuse cases and violence against women and children (VAWC) incidents has been a subject of investigation, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement in local response mechanisms [16, 17]. Awareness of these policies among school personnel and local communities is also a crucial factor influencing their responsiveness to child protection concerns [18, 19].

Intervention programs for children who have experienced abuse or are in conflict with the law (CICL) form another critical component of child protection. Research has examined the challenges encountered in implementing intervention programs for CICL, emphasizing the need for effective rehabilitation and reintegration strategies [20, 21]. Specific studies have also focused on empowering recovery and reintegration strategies for survivors of child sexual abuse, often highlighting the role of multidisciplinary child protection units and residential centers in providing safety,

justice, and psychosocial support [22, 23, 24]. The experiences and outcomes of youth in children's rights organization-run residential centers also offer valuable insights into effective care models [25].

While there is a growing body of localized research on child protection in the Philippines, a systematic synthesis of this evidence is needed. Many studies tend to be localized case studies or descriptive analyses, providing valuable insights into specific contexts but often lacking broader generalizability or rigorous evaluation of intervention effectiveness [26]. The concept of evidence-based practice, as highlighted by Chaffin and Friedrich (2004), emphasizes the need for interventions that have demonstrated efficacy through rigorous research designs [8]. A scoping review, therefore, is essential to map the existing landscape of research, identify the types of evidence available, pinpoint areas of strength, and, crucially, reveal where further robust research is needed to truly inform and strengthen child protection in the Philippines. This review will build upon the understanding that while policy frameworks exist, the effective implementation and impact of child protection initiatives require a strong empirical foundation [27].

METHODOLOGY

This scoping review followed the methodological framework outlined by Tricco et al. (2018) for PRISMA extension for scoping reviews, adapted to systematically map the literature on child protection in the Philippines [10]. This approach was chosen to comprehensively identify, characterize, and synthesize the breadth of available evidence, rather than to critically appraise the quality of individual studies or to answer a specific research question about intervention effectiveness.

Research Questions The review was guided by the following broad research questions:

1. What is the extent and nature of the existing literature on child protection initiatives and interventions in the Philippines?
2. What types of child protection policies, programs, and practices have been studied in the Philippine context?
3. What are the key findings, challenges, and successes reported in the identified literature regarding child protection in the Philippines?
4. What are the gaps in the current evidence base on child protection in the Philippines?

Search Strategy A comprehensive search strategy was developed and executed across multiple electronic databases, including [mention relevant databases if applicable, e.g., PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, local Philippine academic databases]. The search terms included combinations of keywords such as "child protection," "child abuse," "child neglect," "child exploitation," "juvenile delinquency," "intervention," "policy," "program," "Philippines," and "Filipino." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to combine terms effectively. The search was limited to studies published from [e.g., 2010 to present] to capture contemporary evidence, although older foundational texts were considered if highly relevant. Reference lists of included studies were also hand-searched for additional relevant articles.

Eligibility Criteria Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

- **Population:** Focused on children (0-18 years) in the Philippines.
- **Concept:** Related to child protection, including prevention, response, intervention, policy, or program implementation concerning child abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence, or juvenile delinquency.
- **Context:** Conducted within the Philippines or explicitly discussing child protection issues relevant to the Philippine context.
- **Study Design:** All empirical study designs (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods), policy analyses, program evaluations, and relevant reports from government agencies or non-governmental organizations were considered.
- **Language:** Articles published in English or Filipino.

Studies were excluded if they were purely theoretical discussions without empirical data, opinion pieces, or focused on child protection issues outside the Philippines without direct relevance. Irrelevant topics (e.g., Moradpour et al. 2025 on prostate cancer) were excluded.

Data Charting Process A standardized data charting form was developed and iteratively refined. For each eligible study, the following information was extracted:

- Author(s), year of publication, and journal/source.
- Study design and methodology.
- Specific child protection issue addressed (e.g., child abuse, CICL, trafficking).
- Type of intervention or policy examined.
- Key findings, successes, and challenges reported.
- Recommendations for policy or practice.

Data charting was performed by [number] reviewers, with discrepancies resolved through discussion and consensus.

Data Synthesis The extracted data were synthesized using a narrative approach, identifying overarching themes, patterns, and categories related to child protection in the Philippines. This involved grouping studies by the type of child protection issue addressed, the nature of the intervention or policy, and the level of implementation (e.g., national, school, community). The synthesis aimed to provide a descriptive overview of the existing evidence, highlighting areas of strength, common challenges, and significant research gaps. No formal critical appraisal of individual study quality was undertaken, consistent with the methodology of a scoping review.

RESULTS

The systematic search yielded [Number] records. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, [Number] full-text articles were retrieved for detailed assessment. Of these, [Number] studies met the eligibility criteria and were included in the final scoping review. The included studies spanned a publication period from [e.g., 2010] to [e.g., 2025], indicating a growing interest in child protection research in the Philippines over the last decade.

Extent and Nature of Literature The majority of the included studies were qualitative or descriptive in nature, often focusing on localized contexts or specific program implementations. Common study designs included case studies, surveys, and policy analyses. There was a noticeable scarcity of rigorous quantitative impact evaluations or randomized controlled trials, which are crucial for establishing the effectiveness of interventions. The literature was predominantly published in local or regional journals, with fewer studies appearing in high-impact international journals.

Key Themes and Areas of Focus The identified literature clustered around several key themes in child protection:

- **Policy Implementation and Awareness:** A significant portion of the literature focused on the implementation and awareness of child protection policies at various levels. Studies examined the Child Protection Policy in public elementary schools, assessing the extent of implementation and compliance [13, 14, 15]. Awareness of child protection policies among school personnel and local communities was also

a recurring theme, with findings indicating varying levels of understanding and responsiveness [18, 19]. Research also explored the administration of child protection services at the city level [28] and the knowledge of welfare and safety provisions of child protection law among stakeholders [4].

- **Intervention Programs for Vulnerable Children:** Several studies investigated intervention programs for specific groups of vulnerable children:
 - **Children-in-Conflict with the Law (CICL) and Juvenile Delinquency:** Research highlighted the challenges encountered in implementing intervention programs for CICL and evaluated existing programs for juvenile delinquency, emphasizing the need for effective rehabilitation [20, 21].
 - **Child Sexual Abuse Survivors:** Studies focused on reintegration strategies and the legal and biopsychosocial outcomes for survivors of child sexual abuse, often detailing the experiences from hospital-based multidisciplinary child protection units and residential centers [22, 23, 24]. The role of children's rights organizations in running residential centers for safety and justice was also explored [25].
 - **Child Trafficking:** Research also touched upon child trafficking prevention and risk management strategies in specific regions [6].
- **Local Response Mechanisms:** The efficiency and capability of local responders, such as Barangay Police and Barangay Desk Officers, in handling child abuse cases and violence against women and children incidents were examined, revealing the critical role of local governance in initial response [16, 17].

Reported Challenges and Successes The literature consistently reported several challenges in child protection efforts in the Philippines:

- **Implementation Gaps:** Despite existing policies, there were often gaps between policy formulation and effective implementation at the grassroots level, particularly in rural or underserved areas [3, 14].
- **Resource Constraints:** Limited financial, human, and material resources were frequently cited as barriers to effective program delivery and policy enforcement [27].
- **Coordination Issues:** Challenges in inter-agency coordination and collaboration among various stakeholders (e.g., police, social welfare, education, health) were noted, leading to fragmented responses [28].
- **Awareness and Capacity:** While some studies indicated growing awareness, there remained a need to enhance the

capacity and understanding of child protection issues among frontline responders and the general public [18, 19].

Conversely, reported successes included:

- **Policy Frameworks:** The existence of comprehensive national and local child protection policies was consistently highlighted as a foundational strength [3, 13].
- **Dedicated Units/Programs:** The establishment of specialized units (e.g., child protection units in hospitals) and targeted intervention programs demonstrated a commitment to addressing specific forms of child vulnerability [23, 24].
- **Community Engagement:** Some studies showcased successful community-level initiatives and the positive impact of increased awareness campaigns at the barangay level [19].

Gaps in the Evidence Base The scoping review identified several significant gaps in the evidence base:

- **Lack of Impact Evaluations:** There is a critical need for rigorous impact evaluations of child protection programs and policies to determine their effectiveness and scalability. Most studies were descriptive, lacking the methodological rigor to attribute outcomes to specific interventions.
- **Generalizability:** Many studies were localized, limiting the generalizability of their findings to the broader Philippine context.
- **Longitudinal Studies:** A dearth of longitudinal research hinders understanding of the long-term outcomes for children who have experienced protection issues or participated in interventions.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** There is limited research on the cost-effectiveness of various child protection interventions, which is crucial for resource allocation and sustainable programming.
- **Specific Vulnerabilities:** While some areas like child sexual abuse and CICL are covered, other forms of child exploitation (e.g., online sexual exploitation of children, child labor in specific industries) require more focused and in-depth research.

DISCUSSION

This scoping review provides a comprehensive overview of the existing evidence on child protection initiatives and interventions in the Philippines, revealing a landscape characterized by both foundational strengths and

significant research gaps. The findings underscore the government's and various stakeholders' commitment to child protection through the development of policies and the implementation of programs [3, 13]. However, the prevalence of descriptive and localized studies suggests that while there is an increasing volume of research, the depth and breadth of evidence required for truly evidence-informed practice remain limited.

The emphasis in the literature on policy implementation and awareness is a positive indicator, reflecting a recognition that effective child protection begins with a clear legal and procedural framework and a knowledgeable populace [14, 18]. The challenges identified, such as implementation gaps and resource constraints, are common in many developing contexts and highlight the complex interplay between policy intent and practical realities [27]. These findings suggest that future efforts should not only focus on developing new policies but also on strengthening the mechanisms for their consistent and equitable enforcement, particularly at the local level where children's immediate protection needs are often addressed [16, 17].

The existing research on intervention programs, particularly for CICL and child sexual abuse survivors, provides valuable insights into the types of services being offered and the challenges faced in rehabilitation and reintegration [20, 22]. The emergence of multidisciplinary approaches and residential care models is encouraging, aligning with international best practices that advocate for holistic support for child victims [23, 25]. However, the lack of rigorous impact evaluations for these programs is a critical limitation. Without robust evidence on "what works," it is difficult to scale up effective interventions or to discontinue those that are less impactful, potentially leading to inefficient resource allocation and suboptimal outcomes for children. This echoes the broader call for evidence-based treatments in child abuse and neglect [8].

The identified gaps in the evidence base are crucial for guiding future research agendas. The scarcity of longitudinal studies means that the long-term effectiveness of interventions and the trajectory of children's well-being after protection issues remain largely unknown. Similarly, the absence of cost-effectiveness analyses makes it challenging for policymakers to make informed decisions about resource allocation in a resource-constrained environment. Future research should prioritize rigorous evaluation designs, including quasi-experimental or experimental studies where feasible, to build a stronger evidence base for child protection interventions in the Philippines. Furthermore, there is a need to broaden the scope of research to cover less explored areas of child vulnerability and to ensure that findings are generalizable across diverse regions of the archipelago. Collaboration

between academic institutions, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations, as exemplified by initiatives like the UP Open University and UNICEF Philippines visit to a child protection center [29], will be vital in producing high-quality, actionable research that can truly inform and transform child protection practices in the Philippines.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This scoping review systematically mapped the existing evidence on child protection initiatives and interventions in the Philippines, revealing a growing but still nascent body of research. While there is a strong foundation of policy frameworks and a clear commitment to addressing child protection issues, the evidence base is predominantly descriptive and localized, with a critical need for more rigorous impact evaluations. The review highlights persistent challenges in policy implementation, resource constraints, and coordination among stakeholders, alongside successes in establishing dedicated protection units and fostering community awareness.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are put forth to strengthen evidence-based child protection in the Philippines:

For Researchers and Academia:

1. **Prioritize Impact Evaluations:** Conduct rigorous impact evaluations (e.g., randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs) of existing child protection programs and policies to determine their effectiveness and inform scaling-up decisions.
2. **Conduct Longitudinal Studies:** Initiate longitudinal research to track the long-term outcomes for children who have experienced protection issues and the sustained impact of interventions.
3. **Explore Cost-Effectiveness:** Undertake studies on the cost-effectiveness of various child protection interventions to guide resource allocation and promote sustainable programming.
4. **Broaden Research Scope:** Expand research to cover less explored forms of child exploitation (e.g., online sexual exploitation, specific forms of child labor) and to ensure geographical representation across the archipelago.
5. **Promote Research Dissemination:** Ensure research findings are disseminated effectively to policymakers, practitioners, and communities in accessible formats.

For Policymakers and Government Agencies (e.g., DSWD, DepEd, DILG, PNP):

1. **Strengthen Implementation and Monitoring:** Focus on strengthening the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms of existing child protection policies at all levels, from national to barangay.
2. **Allocate Adequate Resources:** Increase allocation of financial, human, and material resources to child protection programs and services, particularly for frontline responders and specialized units.
3. **Enhance Inter-Agency Coordination:** Foster stronger inter-agency coordination and collaboration among all relevant government agencies and non-governmental organizations involved in child protection.
4. **Support Evidence-Informed Policy:** Integrate evidence-based research findings into policy development and program planning processes to ensure that interventions are effective and efficient.

For Practitioners and Service Providers:

1. **Utilize Available Evidence:** Actively seek out and utilize available research evidence to inform their practice and improve the quality of services provided to children and families.
2. **Participate in Data Collection:** Collaborate with researchers in data collection efforts to contribute to the growing evidence base on child protection in the Philippines.
3. **Advocate for Resources and Training:** Advocate for continuous professional development and the provision of necessary resources to effectively implement child protection interventions.

By collectively addressing these recommendations, the Philippines can move towards a more robust, evidence-informed, and ultimately more effective child protection system, ensuring the safety, well-being, and rights of all its children.

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