

# Administration Of Children-At-Risk (CAR) In the Public Secondary Schools in Tarlac Province Before and During the Covid-19 Pandemic Vis-À-Vis Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act Of 2006: Basis for Policy and Program Enhancement

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*Abstract* — This study investigated the management of Children-At-Risk (CAR) in public secondary schools within the Tarlac Province, examining policies, actions, and challenges before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-method design, utilizing a survey questionnaire based on DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2025. Participants included 55 guidance counselors and teachers from various secondary schools. Key informant interviews were conducted with members of the Child Protection Committee (CPC) from four selected schools. Qualitative analysis involved documentary and thematic analysis, while descriptive and inferential statistics, including the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test.

Findings revealed that physical bullying was the highest CAR cases before the pandemic, shifting to cyberbullying during the pandemic years. Incidents of child abuse, sexual harassment, and other forms of abuse by teachers and relatives remained undocumented and unreported. Based on the Wilcoxon test results, the roles of CPC varied significantly in information dissemination, identifying at-risk students, assisting parents, and upholding children's rights before and during the pandemic. Correspondingly, variations were observed in strengthening youth organizations, parent-child integration, behavioral management, values formation, and student welfare promotion. In managing CAR cases, differences were seen in information dissemination, risk assessment, reporting, parental conferences, intervention planning, progress monitoring, restorative justice practices, counseling, and parental training.

CAR cases were inadequately managed due to poor implementation of protocols outlined in DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2025. Key issues identified through interviews included problems in policy guidelines implementation, capacity building, case management, coordination, lack of implementation regarding intervention plans, profiling, and risk assessment.

*Keywords* — *Children-at-Risk, Administration, Case Management, Intervention, Covid-19*

## I. Introduction

Children play a role, in the foundation of any society representing hope and potential for a tomorrow. However, not all young individuals have the privilege of a nurturing upbringing. Those classified as "children at risk" encounter problems such as homelessness, addiction issues, abuse, and involvement in activities. These challenges arise from their vulnerabilities. Restricted access

to resources often results from broken family structures and systemic injustices, within institutions. Consequently, schools play a vital role by offering a safe space, early identification, mental health services, and tailored education. Collaborative efforts with families, community resources, prevention programs, and advocacy ensure their well-being and future success.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 4 provides that the state has the obligation to protect all children and to translate all rights in the Convention into reality. Under the 1987 Philippine Constitution, the “State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all” (Sec.1 Art. XIV). Moreover, “it shall defend the right of children to assistance, including proper care and nutrition, and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation, and other conditions prejudicial to their development” (Article 15, Section 3 [b]).

As a tangible demonstration of its adherence to the CRC's provisions, principles, and standards, the Philippine Congress passed Republic Act No. 7610 on June 17, 1992. This law is titled "An Act Providing Stronger Deterrence and Special Protection Against Child Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination" (DOJ, 2016). In 2002, the Philippines officially endorsed both Optional Protocols linked to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These protocols specifically tackle issues related to (a) child trafficking, (b) child prostitution, and (c) child pornography. To supervise the implementation of RA 7610, the Special Committee for the Protection of Children (SCPC) was formed in 1995 through Executive Order No. 275.

A legal framework known as the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 or RA 9344 adopted on May 20, 2006, aims to safeguard the rights of children who are at risk or who are in legal trouble. The law acknowledges the need for a well-rounded strategy that emphasizes both responsibility and rehabilitation for juvenile offenders. The act's goals are centered on promoting the well-being of vulnerable children. It underlines how crucial it is to give people access to food, shelter, health care, and education. Further, it lessens the possibility that children would participate in hazardous activities by attending to their basic needs, laying the groundwork for their growth and development. Furthermore, this legislation conforms to global benchmarks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), in order to guarantee that the rights of children are upheld and safeguarded during the juvenile justice proceedings (UNICEF, 2019). On the other hand, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 in May 2012, commonly referred to as the Child Protection Policy (CPP). This policy offers guidelines for educators in both public and private schools regarding the application of disciplinary measures for unruly children. The CPP was widely recognized as a pioneering effort by educators to combat bullying within educational settings.

Another law, the Republic Act No. 10627, also known as the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, was signed into law on September 12, 2013 and fully implemented in 2014 was an effort of the government to protect the students from bullying in schools by promoting safe and supportive environment. It requires all elementary and secondary schools in the Philippines to adopt policies

addressing the prevention, intervention, and resolution of bullying incidents. This includes physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying. The law aims to educate students and school personnel on bullying prevention and ensure that proper measures are taken to address and prevent harm caused by such behavior. A year after its implementation, the Department of Education (DepEd) recorded more than 1,700 occurrences of child maltreatment and bullying during the 2013–2014 academic year (Ong & Flores, 2014). 80 percent of the 3,866 respondents to Ramiro's 2015 survey who reported experiencing any kind of violence in the family, school, workplace, or neighborhood.

Being a member organization of the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council (JJWC), the Department of Education is obligated to formulate appropriate guidelines for the implementation of the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act, RA No. 9344, as amended (Rule 18, RIRR of RA No. 9344, as amended). Consequently, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2015 (Management of Children-At-Risk) with the aim of ensuring the effective management of children who are in vulnerable situations, guaranteeing the protection and observance of their rights. The participation of DepEd in this context is of great significance because education is an inherent entitlement of every child and plays a pivotal role in preventing juvenile misconduct and enhancing their overall well-being (Section 2, DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2015).

The Covid-19 pandemic that hit humanity hard and caused the world to tremble has severely affected all sectors including education. A total of 188 nations have issued sanctions. School closures affected almost 1.5 billion children and youth (United Nations, 2020). This new normal also entailed us temporarily setting aside what we have always known, such as face-to-face interaction with students, collaborative learning, class examinations, staff meetings, and parent-teacher dialogue. But avoiding social interaction and staying at home caused more than just emotional stress; because of their mobility problems, women and children were frequently the victims of abuse and other types of violence.

On May 25, 2020, the Department of Justice announced that there had been a 265 percent rise in allegations of child sexual exploitation and abuse online. The Philippines was even designated as the "epicenter of livestreamed child sexual abuse" by the UN. Four times as many cases of child sex abuse were reported in the Philippines between March 1 and May 24, 2020, at about 280,000. As of June 4, 2020, the Philippine National Police had received reports of 3,600 crimes against women and children, which Save the Children (2020) raised worry over. 1,745 of these cases involved children, while 1,945 were women.

In 2022, the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) received reports of approximately 9,000 cases of child abuse from across the country, with some of these incidents taking place within private homes. According to Angelo Tapales, the executive director of CWC, who referenced information collected by women and children protection units present in every hospital in the nation, a total of 8,948 Filipino children experienced acts of assault during that period (Mateo, J. & Flores, H, 2023).

The implementation of Child Protection Policy was a challenge for the Schools Division of Tarlac Province which had only six Registered Guidance Counselors (RGC) and at least one Guidance Teacher Designate for Junior High School (JHS) for seventy-one (71) secondary schools in charge of monitoring the children-at-risk in the secondary schools in School Year 2021-2022 (Youth Formation-SDO Tarlac Province, 2021). The Secondary Schools in the Division with an enrollment of eighty-three thousand forty-two (83, 042) in the JHS for SY 2021-2022 had a guidance designate teacher-student ratio of 1:221 (Planning and Research Unit-SDO Tarlac, 2022).

The Department of Education mandates the hiring of one Registered Guidance Counselor for every 500 students. Based on the student population SY 2021-2022, SDO Tarlac Province should have 166 Registered Guidance Counselors (RGC); SDO Tarlac Province only had 6 RGCs. Hence, there exists a significant scarcity of Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs) in the SDO Tarlac Province primarily due to the stringent educational requirements established by Republic Act (RA 9258), also known as the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004, for licensure candidates. This, coupled with comparatively lower compensation and fewer opportunities, has led applicants to prefer teaching roles over becoming guidance counselors. To navigate around this regulation, the Department of Education finds itself with limited options but to train teachers to take on the responsibilities of guidance teachers. As Republic Act (RA 9258) aimed to professionalize the field of guidance and counseling by restricting it to registered individuals, the role of the guidance teacher is confined to homeroom and career guidance.

The literature and studies revealed a significant research gap in understanding the administration of Children-at-Risk in both private and public schools in the Philippines, particularly in the context of the administration of Public Secondary Schools in Tarlac Province before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a major challenge for DepEd to reach out to the CAR with the guidelines where some principles and rules are no longer applicable to the Covid-19 health and safety protocols. It leaves a very serious question on how the rights of every learner be protected even if they study at home. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the administration of Children-at-Risk in the Schools Division of Tarlac Province before and during the Covid-19 pandemic in order to provide recommendations that can be used to review the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act, RA No. 9344, as amended (Rule 18, RIRR of RA No. 9344), DepEd Guidelines on the Management of Children-At-Risk and Children in Conflict with the Law, and the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004 (RA 9258). Furthermore, it will examine the strengths and gaps in the management strategies and propose evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the protection and well-being of children in schools and at home.

## **II. Methodology**

### ***Method of Research***

The study aimed to examine how children-at-risk were managed in public secondary schools within the Schools Division of Tarlac Province before and during the COVID-19

pandemic, in alignment with the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act (RA No. 9344). A convergent parallel mixed-method research approach was utilized to collect data. According to Creswell and Pablo-Clark (2011), this approach involves simultaneously conducting quantitative and qualitative research, analyzing each separately, and then integrating the findings for a comprehensive interpretation.

### ***Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique***

This research applied the purposive sampling technique in selecting the study participants to ensure that only relevant and knowledgeable individuals participate, thereby enhancing the credibility and depth of the data collected. Given that the study focuses on the administration of Children-at-Risk (CAR) in schools before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, selecting Guidance Counselors and Guidance Designates—who play a crucial role in child protection—aligns with the research objectives. Their involvement as Vice-Chairpersons of the Child Protection Committee (CPC), as mandated by DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, ensures they possess firsthand experience and insights necessary for the study. In the survey, the fifty-two (52) guidance designates and three (3) registered guidance counselors from the fifty-five (55) Secondary Schools in the SDO Province participated in the study. The guidance counselor or designate serves as the Vice Chairperson in the Child Protection Committee (CPC) (DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012). The exclusion of school heads, despite their chairperson role in the CPC, is also justified. Many have served for less than two years, potentially limiting their familiarity with CAR administration before and during the pandemic. This decision minimizes inconsistencies in data and strengthens the study's reliability.

Furthermore, the inclusion of key informant interviews (KII) with school heads, guidance personnel, and teacher representatives enhances data triangulation, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of CAR administration across different perspectives. This mixed-method approach strengthens the validity of findings by corroborating survey data with qualitative insights.

### ***Research Instruments, Data Collection & Procedures***

The study utilized three data collection methods: (1) *Documentary Analysis*. School-based reports on children-at-risk cases, as per DepEd Order No. 59, s. 2015, were analyzed to describe the cases of children-at-risk in the public secondary schools in the Schools Division of Tarlac Province before and during the pandemic. (2) *Survey*. A survey using Google Forms was administered to guidance counselors and designate teachers, describing the administration of CAR policies before and during the pandemic. Participants provided consent prior to completing the survey. The questionnaires adapted from DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2015 and underwent rigorous validation and reliability. The survey instrument was reviewed and validated by experts. The Item-Content Validity Index (i-CVI) and Scale-Content Validity Index (S-CVI) were used to calculate content validity quantitatively to check on the relevance of the individual item and the questionnaire as a research instrument. For inter-rater reliability of the survey questionnaire,

coefficient alpha was applied. A certification was issued to ensure the instrument went through the process of evaluation (3) *Key Informant Interviews*. Interview questions were pre-determined but a series of follow-up questions were asked by the interviewer to the key informants in order to explore some issues or points of clarification. Interviews were conducted via Zoom with selected school heads, guidance counselors/designate teachers, and faculty representatives from 4 Clusters.

With the approval of the Schools Division Superintendent of Tarlac Province and the participants, the researchers conducted data collection while upholding ethical standards. Measures were taken to ensure participant confidentiality, compliance with data privacy regulations, and voluntary participation. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be disposed of after the study, in accordance with the Philippine Data Privacy Act.

### ***Data Analysis***

#### *For quantitative analysis*

**Descriptive statistics.** The gathered data was systematically recorded and tallied to facilitate analysis and interpretation. The frequency count and weighted mean were used to categorize the data for each item. Weighted mean and grand mean were utilized to interpret the overall response or adjectival description for the different items in the questionnaire.

**Inferential statistics.** The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was employed in this study to assess the difference in the administration of Children-at-Risk between two distinct groups of participants before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This non-parametric statistical test is utilized when the data is not normally distributed or when dealing with small sample sizes. Its purpose is to determine whether the median of the differences between paired observations significantly deviates from zero, providing valuable insights into the impact of the pandemic on the administration of Children-at-Risk in the school context.

#### *For qualitative analysis*

**Document Analysis.** School-based reports on children-at-risk cases were analyzed using guidelines outlined in DepEd Order No. 59, s. 2015. **Thematic Analysis.** Key Informant Interviews (KII) transcripts were coded and clustered based on shared meanings. Clusters were labeled to identify patterns and themes within the data.

## **III. Results and Discussion**

### ***1. Children-at-risk (CAR) incidents in the public secondary schools in the Schools Division of Tarlac Province before and during Covid 19 pandemic.***

**Table 1**
*Reported Cases Involving Children-At-Risk for SY 2017-2018*

Classification	Number of Cases				Total
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	
Physical Bullying	16	5	22	26	69
Social Bullying	9	6	12	17	44
Cyber Bullying	1	1	4		6
Retaliation	2	5	1	10	18
Sexual Abuse	1	-	-	1	2
Smoking	-	1	-	-	1
Stealing	-	-	1	1	2
Extortion	-	-	1	-	1
Damage to School Property	-	1	-	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>145</b>

Out of 56 schools, 32 recorded a total of 145 CAR cases, predominantly physical bullying (69 cases) and social bullying (44 cases). The geographical location, specifically in Cluster 3, was cited as a significant factor in high bullying rates, attributed to

the presence of fraternities and risky activities in nearby areas. These factors contribute to the persistent issue of school violence, emphasizing the need for a proactive approach and school-based violence prevention strategies to create safe learning environments for students.

**Table 2**
*Reported Cases Involving Children-At-Risk for SY 2018-2019*

Classification	No. of Cases				Total
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	
Physical Bullying	20	12	79	25	136
Social Bullying	16	8	19	20	63
Cyber Bullying	3	-	5	1	9
Retaliation	6	10	-	5	21
Sexual Abuse	1	-	1	-	2
Physical Abuse	-	-	1	-	1
Psychological Abuse	-	-	1	-	1
Drunkenness	-	-	-	1	1
Smoking	-	-	1	1	2
Extortion	-	-	1	-	1
Damage to school property	-	-	2	-	2
Possession of a Deadly Weapon	1	1	-	-	2
Gang fight	-	-	-	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>242</b>

In SY 2018-2019, there was a significant increase in reported cases of physical bullying, followed by social bullying and retaliation. Cluster 3 had the highest number of cases with 110, followed by Cluster 4 with 54. Although the number of participating schools decreased from 32 to 21, the total reported cases increased dramatically compared to the previous year, SY 2017-2018.

An informant noted that severe cases of physical bullying occurring outside the school were documented, while interventions were implemented for incidents inside the school.

**Table 3**
*Reported Cases Involving Children-At-Risk for SY 2019-2020*

Classification	Number of Cases				Total
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	
Physical Bullying	8	4	32	30	74
Social Bullying	8	6	28	5	47
Cyber Bullying	2	-	10	5	17
Retaliation	6	6	3	5	20
Sexual Abuse	-	1	-	-	1
Smoking	-	-	2	1	3
Gambling	-	-	3	2	5
Stealing	-	1	1	-	2
Extortion	-	1	-	-	1
Possession of a Deadly Weapon	-	-	1	1	2
Sex Scandal	1	1	-	-	2
Act of Lasciviousness	-	-	5	-	5
Gang Fight	-	-	4	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>184</b>

In SY 2019-2020, 19 out of 56 secondary schools in SDO Tarlac Province reported 184 cases involving Children-At-Risk (CAR). Physical bullying, social bullying, and retaliation cases were the most recorded incidents, with Cluster 3 reporting 89 cases and Cluster 4 reporting 50 cases. Cluster 3 also had 4 recorded gang fight cases, attributed to the existence of fraternities, making it

challenging to identify the members. Cases of sexual harassment, including catcalling, stalking, and physical assault, were reported by female learners. Many incidents go unreported due to perceptions that bullying is a common childhood experience, and teachers only intervene if parents file complaints.

**Table 4**
*Reported Cases Involving Children-At-Risk for SY 2020-2021*

Classification	Number of Cases				Total
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	
Social Bullying	2	-	-	3	5
Cyber Bullying	1	1	2	3	7
Stealing	1	-	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>

In SY 2020-2021, only 13 reported cases of Children-at-Risk (CAR) were documented, primarily due to the shift to distance learning, which resulted in zero reported cases in most schools. The guidance office's

functionality was compromised during the pandemic, as class advisers handled students' issues without reporting them to the guidance office. Cyberbullying cases increased during the pandemic, with about 23 percent of youth reporting cyberbullying in 2021 compared to 17 percent in previous years. Some schools offered online or tele-counseling to address students' needs, although accessibility issues remained for students without internet access.

**Table 5**
*Reported Cases Involving Children-At-Risk for SY 2021-2022*

Classification	Number of Cases				Total
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	
Physical Bullying	2	2	2	1	7
Social Bullying	11	1	3	5	20
Cyber Bullying	1	2	3	2	8
Retaliation	-	1	-	-	1
Sexual Abuse	-	-	-	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>38</b>

In the academic year 2021-2022, there is a resurgence of bullying incidents occurred when limited face-to-face classes were reintroduced in the third quarter of SY 2021-2022. Teachers faced challenges in addressing students'

personal and social issues, considering the difficulties students experienced after two years of remote learning. The adjustment period led an increase in the cases of cyberbullying and social bullying, as learners struggled to socialize and adapt.

**Table 6**
*Summary of Reported Cases of Children-At-Risk from SY 2017-2018 to SY 2021-2022*

Classification	Number of Cases					Total
	SY 2017-2018	SY 2018-2019	SY 2019-2020	SY 2020-2021	SY 2021-2022	
Physical Bullying	69	136	74	-	7	286
Social Bullying	44	63	47	5	20	179
Cyber Bullying	6	9	17	7	8	47
Retaliation	18	21	20	-	1	60
Sexual Abuse	2	2	1	-	2	7
Physical Abuse	1	1	-	-	-	2
Sex Scandal	-	-	2	-	-	2
Psychological Abuse	-	1	-	-	-	1
Smoking	1	2	3	-	-	6
Drunkenness	-	1	-	-	-	1
Gambling	-	-	5	-	-	5
Stealing	2	-	2	1	-	5
Extortion	1	1	1	-	-	3
Damage to School Property	2	2	-	-	-	4
Possession of a Deadly Weapon	-	2	2	-	-	4
Acts of Lasciviousness	-	-	5	-	-	5
Gang Fight	-	1	5	-	-	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>622</b>

Between the school years 2017-2018 and 2021-2022, there were a total of 622 reported cases involving children at risk in secondary public schools. Most cases were related to physical bullying, followed by social bullying, retaliation, and cyberbullying.

Notably, there was a significant drop in reported cases during the pandemic, with 13 cases in SY 2020-2021 and 38 cases in SY 2021-2022, likely due to the shift to

distance learning where students had limited physical interaction.

Several factors contributed to the decrease in reported cases. First, the lack of monitoring of students learning from home contributed to undocumented incidents. Second, the absence of

coordination between teachers and guidance counselors led to many cases being settled by teachers without proper documentation. Lastly, only cases deemed "serious" by class advisers were referred to the guidance office, leaving manageable issues unreported.

**Table 7**

*Schools With and Without No Reported Cases of Involving Children-At-Risk in SY 2017-2018*

SY	Cluster Categories	Total Number of Schools per Cluster	Number of Participating Schools	Schools With No Reported Cases of CAR	Schools With Reported Cases of CAR
2017-2018	<i>Cluster 1</i>	24	15	9	6
	<i>Cluster 2</i>	14	10	4	6
	<i>Cluster 3</i>	25	18	7	11
	<i>Cluster 4</i>	17	13	4	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>42</b>
2018-2019	<i>Cluster 1</i>	24	15	11	4
	<i>Cluster 2</i>	14	10	6	4
	<i>Cluster 3</i>	25	18	10	8
	<i>Cluster 4</i>	17	12	8	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>20</b>
2019-2020	<i>Cluster 1</i>	24	15	13	2
	<i>Cluster 2</i>	14	10	6	4
	<i>Cluster 3</i>	25	18	10	8
	<i>Cluster 4</i>	17	13	8	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>19</b>
2020-2021	<i>Cluster 1</i>	24	15	15	0
	<i>Cluster 2</i>	14	10	11	1
	<i>Cluster 3</i>	25	18	14	4
	<i>Cluster 4</i>	17	13	12	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>6</b>
2021-2022	<i>Cluster 1</i>	24	15	15	0
	<i>Cluster 2</i>	14	10	11	1
	<i>Cluster 3</i>	25	18	14	4
	<i>Cluster 4</i>	17	13	12	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>6</b>

Cases involving children at risk often go unreported in certain clusters. One significant factor is the reluctance to report cases once they have been settled by class advisers, leading to underreporting of incidents to the guidance office.

Also, a culture of silence and fear surrounding reporting, especially on topics like sexuality, reproductive health, and sexual violence, hampers young people's access to information and support mechanisms. Legal impunity often allows sexual violence against children to go unpunished due to loopholes, lenient sentencing, or lack of reporting.

**Table 8**

*Comparison of the Number of Recorded Cases involving CAR as to Clusters, SY 2017-2018 to SY 2021-2022*

	2017- 2018	2018- 2019	2019- 2020	2020- 2021	2021- 2022	Total
Cluster 1	29	47	25	4	14	119
Cluster 2	19	31	20	1	6	77
Cluster 3	41	110	89	2	8	250
Cluster 4	56	54	50	6	10	176
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>622</b>

In the academic years from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022, Clusters 3 and 4 consistently reported the highest number of cases involving children-at-risk. Cluster 3, encompassing Gerona, Victoria, San Jose, and Tarlac City, had 110 cases in 2018-2019, dropping to 89 in

2019-2020 due to the pandemic and further decreasing in the limited face-to-face classes of 2021-2022. Cluster 4, covering Lapaz, Capas, Concepcion, and Bamban, similarly experienced a decline in cases during the pandemic.

The high incidence of children-at-risk cases in urban areas like these can be linked to complex factors. Socioeconomic disparities, including high rates of poverty, unemployment, and easy access to drugs and alcohol, create environments conducive to violence and crime (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, 2022). Additionally, gang involvement and substance abuse in urban settings pose significant risks to children, exposing them to violence and unhealthy surroundings (Vigil, 2003).

***Undocumented Cases involving Children-At-Risk***

**Table 9**
*Sub Categories, and Inclusive Themes of Qualitative Data on Undocumented Cases Involving Children-at-Risk*

Sub Categories	Inclusive Themes	
"non serious cases" are settled internally by teachers	Internal Arrangements	<b>Undocumented Cases involving Children-At-Risk</b>
In case of abuse involving a teacher, action taken by the school head	Protection of School Image and Reputation	
Case of child trafficking, action taken by the school head	The School Administration Handles Sensitive and Confidential Cases	
In case of Rape, action taken by the teacher		
Use of illegal drugs, action taken by the school administration		
Alleged rape case		
Case of child trafficking, action taken by the school head	No Formal Complaints and Reports for Alleged Cases	
Abandoned/neglected children		
Self-injury/ Self Harm Behaviors		
Students driving a motorcycle without a license	Child At Risk Cases Outside the School Premises	
Smoking outside the school premises		

The schools in Tarlac Province face significant challenges in handling cases involving children at risk (CAR) due to lack of registered guidance counselors and well-established Child Protection Committees.

Classroom advisers and teachers often assume the role of guidance counselors, addressing students' personal

and social issues, including incidents of bullying.

Teachers lack proper training and support in managing sensitive issues, leading to inappropriate risk assessments and conflict resolution. The lack of a uniform reporting system hampers effective intervention. Cases of child trafficking, drug use, and sexual abuse are handled internally, sometimes leading to cover-ups to maintain the school's reputation. Cases involving teachers' misconduct are also downplayed, further jeopardizing students' safety. Cases of child trafficking, drug use, and sexual abuse are handled internally, sometimes leading to cover-ups to maintain the school's reputation. Cases involving teachers' misconduct are also restrained, further jeopardizing students' safety.

## **2. Administration of Secondary Schools of (Children-At-Risk (CAR) in the Public Secondary Schools in The Schools Division of Tarlac Province Before the Pandemic**

**Table 12**
*Roles of the Child Protection Committee*

Item Statements	Before Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Mean	Verbal Description	Mean	Verbal Description
1. Initiated information dissemination programs and organized activities for the protection of children from abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, and bullying or peer abuse.	4.36	Implemented	3.8	Implemented
2. Developed and implemented a school-based referral and monitoring system.	3.96	Implemented	3.53	Implemented
3. Established a system for identifying students who may be suffering from significant harm based on any physical, emotional, or behavioral signs	4.00	Implemented	3.47	Partially implemented
4. Identified, referred, and, if appropriate, reported to the appropriate offices cases involving child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, and bullying	4.33	Implemented	3.6	Implemented
5. Gave assistance to parents or guardians, whenever necessary in securing expert guidance counseling from the appropriate offices or institutions	4.35	Implemented	3.76	Implemented
6. Coordinated closely with the Women and Child Protection Desk of the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO), other government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as may be appropriate	3.96	Implemented	3.42	Partially implemented
7. Monitored the implementation of positive measures and effective procedures in providing the necessary support for the child and for those who care for the child	4.29	Implemented	3.75	Implemented
8. Ensured that the children's right to be heard is respected and upheld in all matters and procedures affecting their welfare	4.56	Fully Implemented	4.24	Implemented

Schools prioritize children's right to be heard (mean 4.56) and conduct awareness programs and anti-abuse activities, aiding parents in counseling (means 4.36 and 4.35). However, establishing a school-based referral system and coordinating with authorities scored lower (mean 3.96). During the pandemic, schools respected children's right to be heard (mean 4.24), organized protective activities (mean 3.8), and assisted parents in counseling (mean 3.76). Challenges arose in implementing roles due to distance learning, with students primarily communicating issues with class advisors serving as their guidance counselors. Before the pandemic, the Child Protection Committee's roles were slightly higher compared to during the pandemic. The committee prioritized children's right to be heard and conducted awareness programs. However, challenges emerged during the pandemic due to distance learning, impacting the effectiveness of the committee's roles.

**Table 13**
*Capacity Building for School Officials, Personnel, Parents and Students*

Item Statement	Before Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Mean	Verbal Description	Mean	Verbal Description
1 School has conducted regular capacity-building activities for school officials handling various issues and concerns affecting CAR (Seminars, workshops, and trainings).	3.78	Implemented	3.45	Partially implemented
2 School has conducted regular capacity-building activities for personnel in handling various issues and concerns affecting CAR (Seminars, workshops, and trainings).	3.75	Implemented	3.51	Implemented
3 School has conducted regular capacity-building activities for parents (Seminars, workshops, and trainings).	3.56	Implemented	3.29	Partially implemented
4 School has conducted regular capacity-building activities for students (Seminars, workshops, and trainings).	3.87	Implemented	3.47	Partially implemented
<b>Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.74</b>	Implemented	<b>3.43</b>	Partially implemented

Table 13 illustrates varying levels of capacity building in secondary schools concerning children-at-risk administration before the pandemic. While schools organized regular activities for students and officials (means 3.87 and 3.78) related to Child Protection Policy, personnel training (mean 3.75) and parental involvement (mean 3.56) were less common. Irregularity in these efforts impacted the handling of children-at-risk cases. The roles of the Child Protection Committee (CPC) included seminars on Child Protection Policy, Anti-Drugs Campaign by the PNP, and some cases where no activities were conducted before the pandemic.

During the pandemic, participants reported a mean of 3.51 for conducting regular capacity-building activities for personnel dealing with issues affecting Children-At-Risk (CAR). However, several schools do not organize these sessions due to challenges like remote learning and social gathering restrictions. Capacity-building activities for students (mean 3.47) faced hurdles, with some schools not organizing them due to lack of consideration or concerns about social distancing. Consequently, capacity-building efforts during the pandemic were only partially implemented.

*Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children-at-Risk*

**Table 14**

*Primary Level Interventions*

Item Statements (Section 12)	Before Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Mean	Verbal Description	Mean	Verbal Description
1 Creation of Youth Resource Center and implementation of after-school programs	3.05	Partially implemented	2.85	Partially implemented
2 Institutionalization of activities for children and youth such as congress, camp, summit, forum	3.31	Partially implemented	2.91	Partially implemented
3 Strengthening of child and youth organizations like Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), Pag-asa Youth Association of the Philippines (PYAP) and Church-Based Organizations, among others.	3.75	Implemented	3.15	Partially implemented
4 Parent-Child Integration Program which allows family encounter and bonding. Parents are led to be more involved in their children’s schooling in the process.	3.82	Implemented	3.22	Partially implemented
5 School-wide behavior management program using positive discipline and non-violent approach to student discipline concerns	4.42	Implemented	3.76	Implemented
6 Development of value formation activities and life skills training for the children	4.2	Implemented	3.58	Implemented
7 Provision of health services to Children-At-Risk	3.75	Implemented	3.4	Partially implemented
8 Organizing seminars, workshops, and trainings that promote awareness of the ill-effects of risky behavior, that enhance parent effectiveness skills, that develop coping or adjustment skills among children/youth and that explore venues that provide for home-school-community collaboration to achieve the goal of the primary intervention.	3.85	Implemented	3.42	Partially implemented

Participants favored a school-wide positive discipline approach (rated 4.42) as the primary intervention for managing children-at-risk (CAR). Value formation activities and life skills training were also prominent, rated at 4.2. Efforts included organizing awareness seminars, enhancing parental skills, and fostering coping skills, rated at 3.85 before the pandemic.

However, even before the pandemic, no youth center was established. Consequently, primary level interventions for Children-At-Risk during the pandemic were only partially implemented (3.29) because most schools reported no cases of CAR. Also, based on the collected data from the interviews, the following primary-level interventions were not implemented during the pandemic: Youth Center, Leadership Training, and Youth Organization.

**Table 15**

*Secondary Level of Interventions*

Item Statements	Before Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Mean	Verbal Description	Mean	Verbal Description
1 The guidance counselor/teacher, in cooperation of the CPC and other stakeholders, has conducted guidance counseling	4.09	Implemented	3.55	Implemented
2 The guidance counselor/teacher, in cooperation of the CPC and other stakeholders, has conducted peer counseling	3.71	Implemented	3.31	Partially implemented
3 The guidance counselor/teacher organized a Behavior Management Program, such as anger management and conflict resolution	3.69	Implemented	3.33	Partially implemented
4 The guidance counselor/teacher, in cooperation of the CPC and other stakeholders, organized parenting skills training or parent effectiveness seminar	3.69	Implemented	3.2	Partially implemented
5 The guidance counselor/teacher did a home visitation service	4.06	Implemented	3.91	Implemented
6 The guidance counselor/teacher conducted a mentoring program	4.05	Implemented	3.8	Implemented
7 The guidance counselor/teacher organized an after-school activities, such as remedial classes, and extracurricular activities	4.15	Implemented	3.44	Partially implemented
8 The guidance counselor/teacher made a referral of children with special needs to other service-providers such as DSWD, Child Protection Unit, NGOs	3.75	Implemented	3.24	Partially implemented
Weighted Mean	3.90	Implemented	3.47	Partially implemented

Secondary Level Interventions for children-at-risk (CAR) in secondary schools exhibit varying levels of implementation. Activities such as after-school programs, guidance counseling with CPC collaboration, and home visitation services were relatively well-received before the pandemic. Overall, before the pandemic, secondary-level interventions included organized parenting skills, behavioral management programs, and conducted guidance counseling while partially implemented during the pandemic period.

***Procedures in the Management of Cases of Children-at-Risk***

**Table 16**

*Children at Risk of Committing Criminal Offense*

Item Statements	Before Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Mean	Verbal Description	Mean	Verbal Description
1 Upon receipt of such information, the guidance counselor or guidance teacher gathered relevant information about the child, including his/her family background for validation purpose	4.18	Implemented	3.49	Partially implemented
2 Based on the relevant information gathered, the guidance counselor or guidance teacher assessed the child at risk using the Profiling and Initial Risk Assessment Tools for Children-at-Risk	4.09	Implemented	3.38	Partially implemented
3 Informed the school head/principal about the CAR	4.45	Implemented	3.76	Implemented
4 Called the parent or guardian for a case conference	4.38	Implemented	3.78	Implemented
5 Drafted an appropriate intervention plan consented to by the CAR, his/her parent/guardian, including the therein indicators of success or improvement	3.84	Implemented	3.35	Partially implemented
6 Reported to the school head/principal the agreed intervention plan	4.11	Implemented	3.47	Partially implemented
7 The school head/principal ensured that the intervention plan made during the case conference shall be implemented	4.09	Implemented	3.47	Partially implemented
8 The guidance counselor or guidance teacher monitored the implementation of the intervention plan and the progress of the CAR based on the agreed indicator of improvement or success as a result of the intervention plan	4.11	Implemented	3.4	Partially implemented
9 The school head/principal was duly informed of the cases and actions taken involving the CAR.	4.24	Implemented	3.67	Implemented
<b>Weighted mean</b>	<b>4.17</b>	Implemented	<b>3.53</b>	Implemented

Table 16 illustrates the management of children-at-risk of committing criminal offenses in secondary schools before and during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, school heads were promptly informed about cases (4.45), and parents participated in case conferences (4.38). However, establishing clear success indicators in intervention plans was less common (3.84). Despite challenges, procedures for managing children-at-risk were generally implemented (4.17). During the pandemic, case conferences and informing school authorities were perceived as implemented, but monitoring intervention plans was only partially achieved. Overall, the administration procedures for children-at-risk were partially implemented during the pandemic.

***Significant Difference Between the Administration of Children-At-Risk Before And During Covid-19 Pandemic***

**Table 18**

*Roles of the Child Protection Committee*

Item Statements		Mean	p-value	Remarks
1. Initiated information dissemination programs and organized activities for the protection of children from abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, and bullying or peer abuse.	Pre	4.36	0.0047	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.8		
2. Developed and implemented a school based referral and monitoring system.	Pre	3.96	0.055	No Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.53		
3. Established a system for identifying students who may be suffering from significant harm based on any physical, emotional, or behavioral signs	Pre	4	0.0084	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.47		
4. Identified, referred, and, if appropriate, reported to the appropriate offices of cases involving child abuse, exploitation, violence, discrimination, and bullying	Pre	4.33	0.0002	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.6		
5. Gave assistance to parents or guardians, whenever necessary in securing expert guidance counseling from the appropriate offices or institutions	Pre	4.35	0.0019	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.76		
. Coordinated closely with the Women and Child Protection Desks of the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO), other government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as may be appropriate	Pre	3.96	0.0118	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.42		
. Monitored the implementation of positive measures and effective procedures in providing the necessary support for the child and for those who care for the child	Pre	4.29	0.0014	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.75		
. Ensured that the children's right to be heard is respected and upheld in all matters and procedures affecting their welfare	Pre	4.56	0.0324	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	4.24		

The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed significant differences in the roles of the Child Protection Policy (CPC) in managing Children-At-Risk (CAR) before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Activities like Child Protection Policy and Anti-Bullying programs, prominent before the pandemic, ceased due to the suspension of face-to-face classes ( $z=2.820$ ,  $p=0.0047$ ). Identifying at-risk students became challenging without regular face-to-face interactions ( $z=2.627$ ,  $p=0.0084$ ).

Reporting cases of abuse and providing guidance counseling to parents faced disruptions due to limited connectivity and lack of ICT training among counselors ( $z=3.691$ ,  $p=0.0002$ ;  $z=3.110$ ,  $p=0.0019$ ). Coordination with external agencies like the Philippine National Police and the Department of Social Welfare and Development also suffered ( $z=2.505$ ,  $p=0.0118$ ). Additionally, monitoring positive measures and safeguarding children's rights faced obstacles without face-to-face counseling ( $z=3.165$ ,  $p=0.0014$ ;  $z=2.131$ ,  $p=0.0324$ ).

In summary, the CPC's roles faced significant challenges during the pandemic, including activity termination, difficulty in identifying at-risk students, disrupted reporting, limited support to parents, coordination issues, and communication barriers. These challenges were exacerbated by the absence of face-to-face interactions, hindering the CPC's effectiveness amid unprecedented circumstances.

**Table 20**
*Prevention and intervention Programs for Children -at-Risk*

<b>A. Primary Level Interventions</b>		<b>Mean</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1. Creation of Youth Resource Center and implementation of after-school programs	Pre Pandemic	3.05	0.285	No Significant Difference
	Pandemic	2.85		
2. Institutionalization of activities for children and youth such as congress, camp, summit, and forum.	Pre	3.31	0.0606	No Significant Difference
	Pandemic	2.91		
3. Strengthening of child and youth organizations like Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), Pag-asa Youth Association of the Philippines (PYAP) and Church-Based Organizations, among others.	Pre	3.75	0.0024	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.15		
4. Parent-Child Integration Program which allows family encounter and bonding. Parents are led to be more involved in their children's schooling in the process.	Pre	3.82	0.0052	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.22		
5. School-wide behavior management program using positive discipline and non-violent approach to student discipline concerns	Pre	4.42	0.0006	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.76		
6. Development of value formation activities and life skills training for the children	Pre	4.2	0.0015	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.58		
7. Provision of health services to Children-At-Risk	Pre	3.75	0.0637	No Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.4		
8. Organizing seminars, workshops, and trainings that promote awareness on the ill-effects of risky behavior, enhance parent effectiveness skills, that develop coping or adjustment skills among children/youth and that explore venues that provide for home-school-community collaboration to achieve the goal of the primary intervention.	Pre	3.85	0.0292	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.42		

Before the pandemic, there were no significant changes in the implementation of certain interventions, such as the creation of Youth Resource Centers, institutionalization of activities like congresses and camps, and provision of health services to Children-At-Risk. These programs were not in place due to constraints like lack of classrooms and resources. However, there was a notable difference in the strengthening of child and youth organizations such as Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) and Pag-asa Youth Association of the Philippines (PYAP) before and during the pandemic. These organizations were active and supported by schools, but their activities were temporarily stopped during distance learning.

Additionally, significant changes were observed in the implementation of the Parent-Child Integration Program, school-wide behavior management using positive discipline, development of value formation activities and life skills training, and organizing seminars promoting awareness on risky behavior. Before the pandemic, these programs involved active participation from

students and parents. However, during the pandemic, the distribution of modules took precedence over these activities, leading to a shift in focus.

**Table 22**

*Procedures in the Management of Cases of Children-at-Risk*

<b>A. Children at Risk of Committing Criminal Offenses</b>		<b>Mean</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1. Upon receipt of such information, the guidance counselor or guidance teacher gathered relevant information about the child, including his/her family background for validation purpose	Pre	4.18	0.0009	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.49		
2. Based on the relevant information gathered, the guidance counselor or guidance teacher assessed the child at risk using the Profiling and Initial Risk Assessment Tools for Children-at-Risk	Pre	4.09	0.0008	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.38		
3. Informed the school head/principal about the CAR	Pre	4.45	0.0012	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.76		
4. Called the parent or guardian for a case conference	Pre	4.38	0.0071	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.78		
5. Drafted an appropriate intervention plan consented to by the CAR, his/her parent/guardian, including the therein indicators of success or improvement	Pre	3.84	0.0261	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.35		
6. Reported to the school head/principal the agreed intervention plan	Pre	4.11	0.0061	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.47		
7. The school head/principal ensured that the intervention plan made during the case conference shall be implemented	Pre	4.09	0.0079	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.47		
8. The guidance counselor or guidance teacher monitored the implementation of the intervention plan and the progress of the CAR based on the agreed indicator of improvement or success as a result of the intervention plan	Pre	4.11	0.0013	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.4		
9. The school head/principal was duly informed of the cases and actions taken involving the CAR.	Pre	4.24	0.0151	Significant Difference
	Pandemic	3.67		

The results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test highlighted significant differences in overall various procedures. These included gathering relevant information about the child and their family background, assessing the child at risk using specific tools, informing school authorities, conducting case conferences, developing intervention plans, and monitoring progress. The restrictions imposed due to pandemic, coupled with limited access and communication between

students and teachers, made it difficult to collect essential information and conduct assessments. The shift to online platforms further complicated the process due to varying internet connectivity among students. As a result, the management of cases involving children at risk of committing criminal offenses was severely impacted during the period of distance learning.

***Problems Encountered by Public Secondary Schools in SDO Tarlac Province in the Administration of the Children-At-Risk Before and During the Pandemic***

**Table 24**

*Summary of Key Informant Interview Results, Problems Encountered by Public Secondary Schools in SDO Tarlac Province in the Administration of the Children-At-Risk Before and During the Pandemic*

<b>Problems Encountered on</b>	<b>Before Pandemic</b>	<b>During the Pandemic</b>
<i>Policy Guidelines</i>	❖ The DepEd guidelines in the management CAR are complicated and general (Unspecific)	❖ The DepEd guidelines in the management CAR are complicated and general (Unspecific)
<i>Capacity Building Activities</i>	❖ Lack of capacity-building activities for guidance designate teachers in managing cases related to CAR ❖ Lack of capacity-building activities for other members of the Child Protection Committee ❖ Lack of capacity of guidance designate to provide counseling	❖ Lack of training and seminars for teachers in handling cases during limited face to face ❖ Lack of capacity-building activities for teachers in providing guidance counseling during the distance learning modality
<i>Case Management</i>	❖ Lack of Registered Guidance Counselor ❖ The guidance designate has teaching loads that do not allow him/her to render full-time guidance counsel services ❖ The guidance designate is not familiar with handling CAR cases ❖ Non-familiarity of teachers in handling CAR cases	❖ Difficulty in identifying students who are suffering from significant harm due to the absence of face-to-face communication ❖ Determining and applying appropriate intervention is difficult in remote setup
<i>Implementation and Coordination</i>	❖ Lack of coordination with the Women and Child Protection Desks of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and DSWD ❖ Lack of involvement of parents in the management of CAR ❖ Victims' hesitation to report cases of abuse to the Child Protection Committee ❖ Not institutionalized school-based referral of CAR	❖ Lack of a school-based system for monitoring CAR cases ❖ Difficulty in implementing programs related to the management of CAR due to health restrictions ❖ Guidance service is not active during the pandemic ❖ Mechanisms for reporting and referring cases of violence against children have been affected

The difficulties faced by Public Secondary Schools in SDO Tarlac Province in managing Children-At-Risk before and during the pandemic encompassed issues such as unclear and unspecified policy directives, inadequate training for teachers and staff, the absence of Registered Guidance Counselors (RGC) for program facilitation, teacher unfamiliarity with case management, poor coordination with relevant offices, limited parental engagement, and the absence of a structured referral system.

Similarly, these same challenges persisted during the pandemic, including issues with unclear guidelines, limited training opportunities for teachers, parents, and CPC members. Moreover, difficulties in profiling, conducting risk assessments, providing interventions, and establishing monitoring mechanisms were amplified due to the closure of schools.

#### IV. Conclusion

1. **Consolidation of CAR Cases.** The data highlights a significant number of cases involving children at risk (CAR) in secondary public schools, encompassing issues like bullying, cyberbullying, abuse, and various forms of misconduct. These cases vary across school years, and the shift to distance learning during the pandemic has affected reported cases. Underreporting is a concern due to limited access to healthcare, stigmatization, and fear. Teachers are often the first point of contact for victims seeking help.
2. **Actions Taken.** Common practices include disciplinary proceedings and conflict resolutions, but there is a lack of awareness about child protection services. Schools rely on teachers, guidance designates, and limited Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs) to handle CAR cases. The absence of an integrated child protection monitoring system and confusion regarding policy guidelines. In the context of distance learning, identifying CAR cases and implementing disciplinary measures became even more challenging, rendering existing policies ineffective.
3. **CAR Administration.** DepEd Tarlac Province have made efforts to address CAR issues, but there are areas needing improvement. Before the pandemic, schools organized child protection programs and collaborated with the police, yet the school-based referral system and coordination with relevant agencies could be enhanced.

Capacity-building activities for students, officials, and personnel were conducted, but parental involvement in child protection must be enhanced. Primary level interventions like behavior management and value formation were well-implemented, while secondary level interventions varied, especially during remote learning.

4. **Test of Difference.** More variables with significant difference before and during the pandemic are the following: school head's administration on the roles of the child

protection committee, prevention, and intervention programs for children -at-risk (primary), procedures in the management of cases of children-at-risk (committing criminal offenses). In contrast, less variables with significant difference (pre vs pandemic period) are capacity- building for school officials, personnel, parents, and students' prevention and intervention programs for children -at-risk (secondary), and procedures in the management of cases of children-at-risk (with status offense violation).

5. **Problems Encountered.** It includes unclear and unspecified policy guidelines, insufficient teacher and staff training, lack of Registered Guidance Counselors (RGC) for program facilitation, teacher unfamiliarity with case handling, poor coordination with relevant offices, weak parental involvement, and the absence of a formal referral system.

Conversely, similar challenges persisted during the pandemic, including ambiguous guidelines, limited training for teachers, parents, and CPC members, as well as difficulties in profiling, risk assessment, providing interventions, and implementing monitoring mechanisms due to school closures.

## V. Recommendations

1. **Creation of Capacity Building Intervention.** To enhance child protection efforts, schools in Tarlac Province should focus on intensive capacity-building for parents and children. Creating awareness about abuse reporting mechanisms, establishing hotlines, and encouraging active participation from all stakeholders is crucial. Proper documentation, using prescribed forms, ensures comprehensive reporting of cases. Addressing the shortage of Registered Guidance Counselors can involve lowering qualification standards or increasing their salaries.
2. **Grit Support and Referral Services.** To improve child protection efforts, the Schools Division Office should conduct seminars on the administration of Children-at-Risk cases, positive discipline, and counseling techniques. Regular capacity-building for teachers and CPC members is essential. Parental involvement and coordination with partner agencies for improved child referrals are crucial.
3. **Monitoring, Evaluation and Assessment of Needs and Services.** Intensify capacity-building for school officials, including the head and guidance counselor, as leaders of the Child Protection Committee. Expand primary and secondary interventions and procedures to safeguard children. The Division Office should monitor and help based on evaluations for both face-to-face and distance education.
4. **Policy Analysis & Review.** Policymakers must revise guidelines for managing Children-At-Risk distance education, addressing the lack of face-to-face communication for more comprehensive child protection, focusing on prevention and safeguarding against abuse and violence.

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