

# Child Sexual Abuse And Exploitation Prevention Interventions By Law Enforcement



## **CASE STUDY** **FROM THE PHILIPPINES**

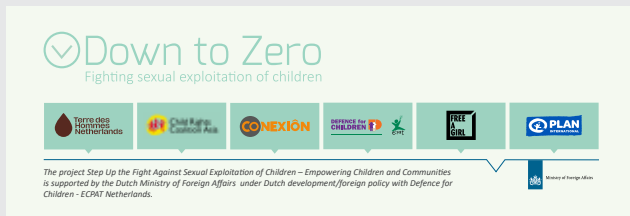


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& ECPAT INTERNATIONAL**

**ECPAT International would like to thank all the persons involved in this case study.**

**ECPAT Philippines:** Jahan Mari Obena, Janice Sofia Talip, Karen Mae Sofia, Ana Maria Dionela

**ECPAT International:** Karina Padilla, Kohnwilai Teppunkoonngam, Sendrine Constant and Andrea Varrella.



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**ECPAT International**

328/1 Phaya Thai Road, Ratchathewi,

Bangkok 10400, THAILAND.

Phone: +66 2 215 3388 | Email: [info@ecpat.org](mailto:info@ecpat.org)

Website: [www.ecpat.org](http://www.ecpat.org)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>AT A GLANCE</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>HOW IS CRIME PREVENTION UNDERSTOOD IN THE PHILIPPINES?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>EXISTING STRATEGIES</b>	<b>9</b>
Awareness raising activities	9
<i>Barangay Empowerment on Child Abuse Resistance and Elimination Fight Unwanted Lewd Design (B.E. C.A.R.E.F.U.L.).</i>	10
<i>Kasimbahayan programme</i>	10
<i>OPLAN SAGIP NENE (Save Nene campaign)</i>	11
<i>Aling Police Mobile” (Maam Police Mobile)</i>	11
Police surveillance	11
Local ordinances to enforce national laws aimed at preventing sexual abuse and exploitation of children	12
Curfew for children	12
Interventions with children who committed offences	13
<b>PERCEIVED POSITIVE OUTCOMES</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>CHALLENGES</b>	<b>15</b>
Harmful gender and social norms	15
<i>Lack of well equipped- personnel</i>	15
Lack of localised crime prevention strategies	17
Limited awareness regarding law enforcement’s prevention role	17
Limited funding to conduct interventions	17
Systemic failures to protect	17
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>ANNEX</b>	<b>21</b>

# INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse and exploitation of children are pervasive issues affecting children of all genders, and no country is exempt from these crimes. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 16.2, emphasises the need to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation by safeguarding children from abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence. Recent international standards have evolved to emphasise the police and justice sector's role in preventing violence against children, including sexual abuse and exploitation. The 'UN Model Strategies on Ending Violence Against Children', adopted by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, guide the implementation of comprehensive crime prevention programmes. These strategies define crime prevention as strategies and measures aimed at reducing the risk of crimes occurring and their harmful effects on individuals and society by addressing the multiple causes of crimes. However, there remains a gap in evidence regarding international police cooperation for

effectively preventing sexual abuse and exploitation of children, highlighting the need for further development and collaboration.

To address the existing gap, ECPAT International, as part of the Down to Zero Alliance<sup>1</sup>, has conducted a consultation project aimed at enhancing global advocacy for international police cooperation to prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. To achieve this objective, ECPAT has conducted a [global literature review](#) to map existing practices and successful approaches related to the preventive role of the police, especially concerning child sexual abuse and exploitation. Additionally, two case studies in the Philippines and Indonesia were conducted, involving interviews with key informants. The case studies aimed at document information on existing practices and localised approaches, as well as identify challenges and recommendations to implement and support crime prevention strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> The project "Stepping up the Fight Against Sexual Exploitation of Children – Empowering Children and Communities" (SUFASEC) part of the DTZ Alliance is supported by the [Dutch] Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Dutch development/foreign policy with Defence for Children- ECPAT Netherlands. The programme aims for children in all of their diversity to live free of sexual exploitation, and uses a multi-sector, multi-actor and systemic approach, recognising the complexity of sexual exploitation of children and specific contexts in which it takes place. The Down to Zero Alliance (Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Plan International Netherlands, Defence for Children - ECPAT, Free a Girl, CRC Asia and Conexión) will work with civil society organisations (CSOs) in the Philippines, Thailand, Laos, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Brasil, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic. The programme aims to reach more than 21,000 children.

# AT A GLANCE

## Key Findings

- **Awareness and Community Outreach:** Philippine law enforcement collaborates with communities and NGOs to conduct outreach programs, such as distributing informational leaflets, school seminars, and social media campaigns. Programs like “B.E. CAREFUL,” “Kasimbahayan,” and “Aling Police Mobile” aim to educate communities on legal protections and encourage reporting.
- **Police Surveillance and Local Ordinances:** In high-risk areas, police conduct joint surveillance with community leaders, sometimes until midnight. Local ordinances related to national laws on anti-online sexual abuse are also in place allowing for more tailored and contextualized approaches, with NGOs often lobbying for their passage.
- **Curfews and Juvenile Programs:** Curfews are imposed for minors, and the Barangay Juvenile Intervention Program offers support for young persons who commit offences to aid reintegration and reduce recidivism.

## Outcomes

- **An increase in reported cases** suggests growing community awareness and a positive response to awareness campaigns. In Tagbilaran City, for instance, reports of sexual abuse rose significantly potentially reflecting greater knowledge of reporting pathways.

## Challenges

- **Harmful Social Norms and Cultural Taboos:** Deep-rooted norms often hinder awareness efforts. Gender bias and stigma surrounding online child sexual abuse reduce community engagement and perpetuate misconceptions.
- **Resource Constraints and Personnel Turnover:** Limited staffing and high turnover affect the consistency and reach of crime prevention efforts, as does the lack of updated training on new abuse trends.
- **Limited Local (ized) Policies:** Some municipalities lack locally adapted laws to combat child sexual abuse, impacting the sustainability and effectiveness of interventions.
- **Systemic Failures and Underreporting:** Corruption, illegal settlements, and cultural silence around sexual abuse prevent formal reporting, posing obstacles to prevention and protection efforts.

## Recommendations

- **Enhanced Training and Resources:** Focus on trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, and disability-inclusive strategies for police. Regular training on online sexual abuse trends is needed to improve community education.
- **Collaboration with NGOs and Community Leaders:** Strengthen multisectoral councils and involve local leaders in prevention initiatives to change harmful social norms and reinforce law enforcement's preventive role.
- **Localized Prevention Programs:** Tailor strategies to specific community contexts. Engage Barangay leaders directly in awareness and referral processes to increase reporting and community trust.
- **Targeted Programs for Potential Offenders:** Develop programs addressing the root causes of harmful behaviors, which are currently absent in crime prevention efforts in the country.

# METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

In this consultation, a qualitative approach was employed, involving sixteen key stakeholder semi-structured interviews conducted online over one-hour sessions from January to February 2024. The purpose of these interviews was to explore participant's perceptions on opportunities, challenges, and barriers in implementing, supporting, and replicating models in police cooperation and prevention, focusing on documenting information on existing practices and localised approaches in Indonesia. Prior to the interviews, conducted by ECPAT Philippines, participants provided informed consent and were assured that any questions or concerns would be addressed by the interviewer. They were also made aware of how their data would be used, agreed to be identified by the institutions that were represented, and consented to the recording of the meetings.

Participants in this consultation included representatives from law enforcement agencies, child protection governmental offices, and civil society organisations (see Table 1 in Annex).

ECPAT Philippines conducted the interviews and produced detailed summaries, ECPAT International conducted a thematic analysis,<sup>2</sup>

identifying participants' perceptions on existing mechanisms, challenges, and recommendations to enhance police cooperation in preventing child sexual exploitation and abuse.

The consultation has certain limitations associated with its qualitative approach.<sup>3</sup> Due to the nature of qualitative methods, the relatively small number of participants does not constitute a representative sample. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to the Philippines but rather provide a snapshot inviting a wider range of participants with key roles in crime prevention, including law enforcement officers and civil society organisations. Furthermore, the interviews focused on understanding the perspectives of participants regarding crime prevention to end child sexual abuse and exploitation in the Philippines. This focus may have introduced biases or limitations in the information provided. To address this, additional sources such as documents and studies were consulted to balance their opinions whenever possible. Additionally, it is worth noting that this consultation focused on participants' perceptions only and did not document information on official evaluations or further studies of the effectiveness of the existing crime-prevention strategies.

2 Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2017) Thematic analysis, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12:3, 297-298, DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613

3 Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, Quantitative, and mixed methods*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications. Chapter 9.

# HOW IS CRIME PREVENTION UNDERSTOOD IN THE PHILIPPINES?

The analysis of the interviews shows that **raising awareness of communities** is considered a key aspect of crime prevention in the Philippines, it encompasses a range of strategies mainly aimed at informing children, their families, and communities about existing legislation, risk factors for sexual abuse and exploitation of children, and reporting systems. As summarised by one representative of Laguna Provincial Police Office, *“Police departments and non-governmental organizations engage in community outreach to educate parents, caregivers, and community members about the signs of abuse, how to report suspicions, and how to create a safer environment for children.”*

This is supported by another representative of the Angeles Youth Development Office who explained: *“The Philippine National Police conducts community awareness through the distribution of leaflets in schools, Local Government Units, and barangays. The leaflets provide information such as hotline numbers and the location of nearby police stations.”* While ensuring adequate and effective reporting systems may usually be considered as response strategies, one participant explained that ensuring proper reporting, attention, and

response could be considered a tertiary form of prevention, as it prevents re-offences by offenders and prevents further violence for the victim. *“They [children and their families] do not file formal complaints at the court, they only leave their reports at the blotter level which becomes a challenge for law enforcement in terms of the prevention of re-victimization of the child”*, says one respondent from the Women and Children Protection Department Tubigon.

Another aspect to highlight is that, according to key informants, crime prevention strategies in the Philippines are **focused on hot-spots** identified by the police, as explained by a respondent from the Laguna police: *“The office is strategic in its prevention programmes; they base their efforts on the number of cases in their weekly crime data. They focus their interventions on places where there is a high incidence/prevalence of crime.”*

Moreover, another notable aspect was the recurring theme of online or technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation and abuse in the interviews. Participants expressed concerns about the lack of training to prevent and address these types of crimes. This may suggest that, for participants in the Philippines,



strategies for preventing child sexual abuse and exploitation will depend on the types and manifestations of such violence. This focus aligns with the attention given to online child sexual exploitation, which has been prominent in recent years.

Finally, for many participants, crime prevention strategies are not solely the responsibility of law enforcement

agencies but **a collaborative effort** involving communities and non-governmental agencies. A representative from the Philippines Against Child Trafficking highlighted: *“When we are talking about crime prevention, we are not only talking about the law enforcement agencies but to all the members of the community.”*



## EXISTING STRATEGIES

### Awareness raising activities

A respondent from the Women and Children Protection Centre of Iligan City explained the key role of awareness-raising activities for crime prevention in the Philippines:

*“Our programmes are both proactive and preventive because the best approach for exploitation and abuse of children is awareness. I have undergone training in handling these cases abroad and it affirms that people in the community should know that these acts are illegal, just like online child sexual exploitation and abuse, many community members do not know that it is considered a crime in our country. Thus, communities should be aware that there’s a law protecting children against different forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.”*

Police and judicial agencies, local government units, and non-governmental organisations are conducting training and awareness-raising activities, including seminars, distribution of materials, talks, and online initiatives. These activities target school children and their families, communities for the general public, and high-risk areas.

For example, the Angeles Youth Development Office *“distributes materials like stickers and flyers in public places such as hotels, bus terminals, markets, and schools. The organisation also conducts seminars and lectures on the laws protecting children”*. The Laguna Provincial Police Office explained that *“Police departments and non-governmental organisations engage in community outreach to educate parents, caregivers, and community members about the signs of abuse, how to report suspicions, and how to create a safer environment for children.”*

Online platforms are widely used to disseminate information and to encourage people to report cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>4</sup> *“We even have TikTok accounts and using the Internet for prevention. We provide prevention tips online, that make the community members aware(...)”*, explained the Women and Children Protection Centre -Iligan City and the Women and Children Protection Centre - Bohol highlighted that *“Every police station in Bohol is required to have a social media account on Facebook for awareness raising.”*

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<sup>4</sup> [Tubigon Facebook page](#), example provided by the Women and Children Protection Centre- Tubigon.

Participants provided information of the following programmes that include activities related to the prevention of child sexual exploitation and abuse:

*Barangay Empowerment on Child Abuse Resistance and Elimination Fight Unwanted Lewd Design (B.E. C.A.R.E.F.U.L.)*<sup>5</sup>

The Be careful project is implemented by the Philippine National Police in Region 3- Central Luzon,<sup>6</sup> in coordination with key stakeholders such local Government units, non-governmental organisations, church organisations and community members. The project aimed to strengthen the bonds of Philippine National Police and the community in the campaign to eradicate sexual abuse through massive information campaign to all residents at any age level with the help of partners agencies and stakeholders. It includes house-to-house visits, and barangay-level<sup>7</sup> community awareness on the Anti-Online sexual abuse and exploitation of children and Child sexual abuse or exploitation material Act<sup>8</sup>.

*Kasimbahayan programme*<sup>9</sup>

The programme is implemented by the Women and Children Protection Department in coordination with faith-based organisations. The programme “aims to strengthen partnerships with the public and raise awareness among various communities and emphasizes the key role that PNP personnel and the community play in contributing to peace, order, progress, and holistic societal transformation<sup>10</sup>.” A key component of the programme is community mobilisation, police officer with the assistance of Kasimbayanan advisers, engage with different sectors of the community through information drives, meetings, congresses, seminars, and crime prevention education. The representative of the Women and Child Protection Desk- Iligyan city explained that the Kasimbayanan programme includes topics related to prevention of online child sexual exploitation and abuse in particular. The participant shared: “*In Olongapo (...) this program reaches out to the general public, especially children as this is implemented in schools. They are orienting the children on the negative effects of drugs, online child sexual exploitation and abuse, and peace and order.*”

5 Some cities that have implemented the Be Careful Project are [San Clemente](#), [Tarlac](#), and [San Fernando](#)

6 The Philippines is divided into seventeen (17) regions, with eight (8) located in Luzon, three (3) in the Visayas, and six (6) in Mindanao. These regions, although not classified as local government units, are primarily used for administrative purposes, and each region has a designated city as an administrative center. Region 3- Central Luzon includes seven provinces: Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, and Zambales. Information extracted from [PhilAtlas](#)

7 In the Philippines, a barangay is the smallest political unit, comprising a community led by a barangay captain and barangay assembly. It functions as a local government unit, handling a range of issues including legislation and community festival preparation.

8 [https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2022/ra\\_11930\\_2022.html](https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2022/ra_11930_2022.html)

9 Republic of the Philippines. National Police Commission. PNP. Memorandum Circular N. 2022-112 This Memorandum encourages the nationwide implementation of the KASIMBAYANAN programme and includes guidelines for its implementation.

10 Ibid. page 3

### *OPLAN SAGIP NENE (Save Nene campaign)*

The programme was implemented by the Women and Children Protection desks to disseminate information on the Republic Act 9208-Anti Trafficking in Person Act. For example, in August 2015, the Candelaria Police Station, conducted a session with children and women to discuss crime prevention strategies.<sup>11</sup>

### *Aling Police Mobile” (Maam Police Mobile)*

*“The Philippine National Police under the Women and Children Protection Desk Officers, also has a programme named “Aling Police Mobile” (Maam Police Mobile). The women police officers go around the community with their mobiles to reach out to women and children, providing them easy access to reporting, ensuring confidentiality’ according to the representative of Youth Development Officer EC. This programme allows women and children to report all types of crimes, including sexual exploitation and abuse of children.*

*In summary:* While informing children at risk of experiencing sexual abuse and exploitation or community members are interventions widely implemented by institutions, much research is still needed to demonstrate their effectiveness. In fact, during the writing of this report, no evaluations were

found of awareness-raising activities conducted by law enforcement agencies in the Philippines.<sup>12</sup> Global research show that awareness-raising interventions’ outcomes can vary, but often focus on changes in attitudes and levels of knowledge and fewer on changes in behaviors.<sup>13</sup> If these activities are conducted without targeted efforts to examine and challenge harmful gender and social norms, attitudes and behaviours or without addressing the structural drivers that perpetuate sexual violence against children, these are rarely effective in deterring child sexual abuse and exploitation crimes.

### **Police surveillance**

Police monitors areas with high risks for sexual abuse and exploitation of children. In some areas, the police conduct joint surveillance with other institutions. For example, the Municipal Council for the Protection of Children in Tubigon, led by the police as an active member, conducts joint surveillance with community leaders to prevent child abuse and sexual exploitation. This collaborative effort is part of a multi-purpose surveillance team that also focuses on issues like mendicancy and curfew violations, operating until midnight. Additionally, the Municipal council plans to establish a 24/7 anti-human trafficking help desk in bus terminals to prevent and respond to trafficking reports effectively, according

<sup>11</sup> [Example of an activity](#) shared by Katherine Ramos from Laguna Provincial Police Office

<sup>12</sup> Kewley, S., Mhlanga-Gunda, R., & Van Hout, M. C. (2021). Preventing child sexual abuse before it occurs: examining the scale and nature of secondary public health prevention approaches. *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 29(1), 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2021.2000651>

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund (2020) [Action to end child sexual abuse and exploitation: A review of the evidence](#), UNICEF, New York.

to a respondent from the Municipal Social Welfare Development Office of Tubigon. The interviewee explained *“The regular surveillance team is multi-purpose since it captures all issues and concerns of the community such as child abuse and sexual exploitation of children, mendicancy, and violators of curfew. The surveillance team roams around communities until midnight.”*

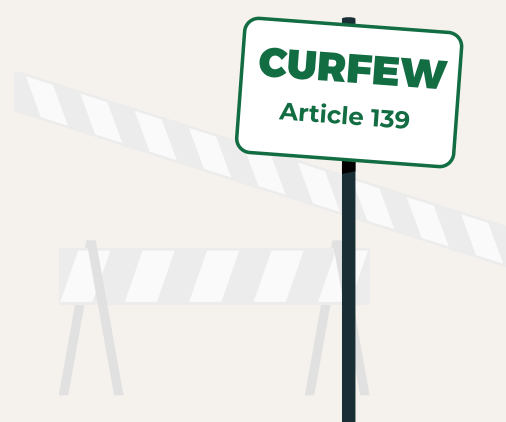
### Local ordinances to enforce national laws aimed at preventing sexual abuse and exploitation of children

Participants pointed out that some cities have passed local ordinances related to the Republic Act 11930 - Anti-Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Anti-Child Sexual Abuse or Exploitation Materials Act. As explained by the representative of Youth Development Officer, *“passing local ordinances promotes sustainability in the efforts of combatting child sexual abuse and exploitation, regardless of the change of leadership and staff in the government offices, the officers will forever protect the children for its mandate.”* Non-governmental organisations play a key role in advocating for the passage of local legislation to protect children, as narrated by the representative from Philippines Against Child Trafficking. *“The organisation is currently lobbying for a child protection policy*

*in Olongapo City, one of the northern cities in the Philippines. This policy will establish ethical guidelines on how to treat and protect children, ensuring that individuals do not become enablers of any form of abuse. It aims to protect children not only from sexual abuse and exploitation but also from other forms of abuse.”*

### Curfew for children

Article 139 of The Child and Youth Welfare Code (Presidential Decree N. 503) states that *“City or municipal councils may prescribe such curfew hours for children as may be warranted by local conditions. The duty to enforce curfew ordinances shall devolve upon the parents or guardians and the local authorities.”* Two participants<sup>14</sup> highlighted curfews as a prevention intervention for child sexual abuse and exploitation. Some cities and municipalities<sup>15</sup> have implemented curfews for individuals under the age of 18 and police typically patrol streets and high-risk areas to enforce the curfew.



14 Representative of the WCPD of Dausi and Representative of the [Municipal Social Welfare Development Office of the LGU of Tubigon](#).

15 For example, the [municipal government of Bacnotan](#) and the [local government of Kalimbo](#) has imposed curfew hours from 10:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. for children aged 17 years old and below.

While curfews are viewed as a key strategy to safeguard children from crimes, their enforcement has long been a topic of debate in the Philippines. Some opponents argue that curfews contradict fundamental human and children's rights, such as the rights of children to freely travel within their respective localities.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, global evidence suggests that curfews might not be effective in reducing crimes or safeguarding children from them.<sup>17</sup>

### Interventions with children who committed offences

When asked about prevention interventions for offenders below 18 years old, participants indicated that there were no specific interventions for those who had committed child sexual abuse and exploitation crime specifically, but rather for crime in general. In the Philippines, the Regional Juvenile Justice and

Welfare Committee is responsible for providing programmes and services for children in conflict with the law. The Comprehensive Barangay Juvenile Intervention Programme is its counterpart, which is a multisectoral and interagency response plan involving the Philippine government, partner agencies, and civil society. The goal of the programme is to reduce the number of new cases of children at risk and to rehabilitate and reintegrate children in conflict with the law into their families and communities. These programmes and services assisting children who have committed crimes as well for children at risk to prevent them from offending.

Considering the global rise of offenses, particularly online, committed by children under 18, specifically tailored interventions targeting children and the prevention of harmful sexual behaviours should be developed and implemented broadly.



<sup>16</sup> For example: Conventus Law (2024, Jan 2<sup>nd</sup>). [Philippines- Constitutionality of Curfews for minors.](#)

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, D. B., Gill, C., Olaghery, A., & McClure, D. (2016). [Juvenile curfew effects on criminal behavior and victimization: a systematic review.](#) *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 12(1), 1-97.

## PERCEIVED POSITIVE OUTCOMES

During the consultation, participants were asked about the positive outcomes of current crime prevention strategies. Some participants noted that the increase in reports of sexual abuse and exploitation of children cases indicates a growing community awareness of laws and referral pathways. In the perception of participants, this increase reflects the success of awareness-raising strategies, encouraging more active reporting and case filing. For example, the Women and Children Protection Department Tubigon representative reported *“The office finds their prevention initiatives effective as there is an increased number of reports in their office.”* Similarly, the representative from Women and Children Protection Centre Bohol said: *“The positive impact is the increase of reported cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation, this is a manifestation that communities are well-informed as they are reporting and filing cases.”*

Participants further clarified that the interventions were designed to inform the public about the existing laws and referral systems, ensuring they were aware of where to report incidents, thus leading to the increase in reports.<sup>18</sup> For example, the representative of Bohol Crisis Intervention Centre provided data from Tagbilaran City shared *“The effectiveness of the advocacy campaigns both in communities and social media and distribution of information, education, communication documents as reports of sexual abuse and exploitation significantly increased by 81.82% from the year 2022-October 2023, most especially in Tagbilaran City as people already know where to report.”*

Although the increase in reports can be perceived as a progress, it is also important to consider that violence against children in general, and child sexual abuse and exploitation in particular, is often underreported due to several factors, including taboos and harmful gender norms<sup>19, 20</sup> and can not be considered in isolation, as an accurate measure of performance in prevention.

18 Representative of WCPD- Tubigon; Representative of Bohol Crisis Intervention Centre; WCPD- Bohol.

19 Ramiro, L. S., Madrid, B. J., Norton-Staal, S., Cajayon-Uy, M. M., & Luna, P. B. (2022). National Baseline Study on Violence against Children and Youth (NBS-VAC) in the Philippines. *Acta Medica Philippina*, 56(15).

20 Balahadia, F. F., Astoveza, Z. J. M., & Jamolin, G. R. (2022). Violence against women and their children incident report: Data exploration for VAWC awareness. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 2(1), 98-119.

# CHALLENGES

## Harmful gender and social norms

**Participants highlighted that gender and social norms that condone and promote child sexual abuse and exploitation hinder the acceptance and effectiveness of prevention efforts. They explained that raising awareness to enforce laws often involves addressing deeply rooted harmful beliefs and attitudes, which can be challenging and may encounter resistances.** For example, a respondent from the Regional Subcommittee for the Welfare of children – Region 3 explained:

*“[The challenge is] The reception also of the community in the awareness programmes, as we are breaking stigmas and traditions especially with the belief of the community that there is no abuse that happened as there is no physical touch that happens in online sexual abuse and exploitation of children. There is also a challenge in breaking traditions in terms of gender bias and stereotypes.” (Representative from the Regional Subcommittee for the welfare of children)*

Some law enforcement officers, and service providers may unconsciously hold gender biases, which influence their approach to prevention activities. These biases can reinforce harmful gender and social norms, making it more challenging to achieve positive outcomes. A representative from the Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons Region 7<sup>21</sup>, for instance, explained that despite police workforce are “sensitised on gender and development, there are still encounters during preventive activities whether it is intentional or unintentional that puts the blame on the victim on their messaging. Unfair labelling among men and women such as if men are being labelled, they are called “individuals who are trying to meet ends,” while women are labelled as “flirt, lead on, hardheaded, stubborn.”

## Lack of well equipped-personnel

**Many interviewees indicated that limited human resources prevent law enforcement officers from developing effective prevention measures and limit the scope of interventions.**

21 Region VII is an administrative region in Central Visayas, it includes 4 provinces: Bohol, Cebu, Negros Oriental and Siquijor



*Given the low quantity of personnel, they cannot actively develop their prevention activities but need to handle cases and other roles assigned to the personnel. (...) the task force also has other roles in their stations, despite the memos, there are stations that do not provide us a task force as the stations itself also lack personnel. (Women and Child Protection Desk, Iligan city)*

The insufficient number of personnel might limit the geographical scope of the intervention. As the representative of the Anti-Trafficking and Violence Against Women and Children of Angeles City, said, “Despite efforts to be effective and efficient, there is a shortage of personnel, especially in the Philippines National Police and Women and Children Protection Desk.” “In a single station, they handle 3-4 barangays, with only one personnel” reported the respondent from the Bohol Department of Justice also stating that “While there are ongoing campaigns, the number of attendees relative to the total population remains minimal.”

**The limited number of human resources also relates with the continued and high turnover of staff.**

For instance, a participant explained that the high turnover cause delays, and affects the sustainability and effectiveness of strategies.

*“The police’s rotational assignment policy causes delays and issues with continuity in implementing activities. (...) Rotational assignments occur*

*every quarter. There is a political factor affecting programme continuity, as local government officials and staff are replaced based on election results every three years. There is also uncertainty regarding prioritisation of programmes for children, including training new staff to handle cases of child abuse and exploitation when they are removed from their positions due to new leadership.” (Youth Development Officer Representative)*

**In addition to the limited number of personnel, there are gaps regarding updated technical knowledge and skills to implement effective preventive measures particularly** in the following areas:

- Developing prevention strategies targeting children with disabilities or children with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.
- Updated knowledge on the trends on the evolving nature of manifestations of child sexual abuse and exploitation, which will allow police officers to provide accurate information during prevention activities.

*“[There is] Limited training available for police officers as trends constantly change. There is also misinterpretation of the laws as they are not updated with training.” (Representative of the Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons Region 3).*

## Lack of localised crime prevention strategies

Two participants expressed concerns about the lack of local adoption of laws to protect children. *“Local policies are not adopted in cities and municipalities. Some cities and municipalities do not have localized ordinances of anti-Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Laws and anti-trafficking.”* The respondent from the Regional Inter-Agency Council on Anti-Trafficking Pampanga -Region 3, reported that local policies are not always tailored to the specific context where they are implemented:

*“From the barangay level to the national level, there are national laws protecting children but are not localised. Others are copied and pasted from the national laws and there is a lack of local initiative.”*

## Limited awareness regarding law enforcement’s prevention role

The police role on prevention is less known than their role on responding to cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation, which can diminish community participation, as explained by the representative from the Philippines Against Child Trafficking: *“community see police officers as someone to report to, and not part in the prevention. I don’t know if the community knows that the police have the role in the law in prevention.”*

## Limited funding to conduct interventions

Participants expressed that there are barriers related to financial resources. One participant provided a concrete example: *“the creation of a task force for online sexual abuse and exploitation of children revealed challenges on the financial limitations of the office especially in the conduct of surveillance (online transactions to target facilitators that cost a minimum of 3,500.00 PHP per transaction). Currently, we are doing case build-up, and we don’t know where to get the funds for the conduct of the surveillance.”* (Philippines Against Child Trafficking). The constrained resources may imply efforts are put on responding to cases rather than preventing their occurrence.



## Systemic failures to protect

When asked about the challenges for law enforcement crime prevention, many participants highlighted systemic failures that lead to the withdrawal of complaints and underreporting of cases. While these refers mostly to the difficulties to ensure an appropriate response to cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation, one participant explained that not filing complaints creates a challenge to protect children from re-victimisation. The participant said: *“They [children and their families] do not file formal complaints at the court, they only leave their reports at the blotter level which becomes a challenge for law enforcement in terms of the prevention of re-victimization of the child”* (Representative from Women and Children Protection Department Tubigon).

The culture of silence, illegal arrangements between families and offenders, often facilitated by perpetrators’ manipulations and corruption were some of the failures and limitations mentioned by participants to this case study. This is consistent with existing literature, which explains that when the police fail to enforce the law and child protection services are unresponsive to sexually abused or exploited children, victims are less likely to disclose their experiences and seek help. This leaves them vulnerable to further victimization, while perpetrators go unpunished.<sup>22</sup>



22 United Nations Children's Fund. (2020). *Action to end child sexual abuse and exploitation: A review of the evidence*. UNICEF: New York.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents recommendations for police and civil society organisations for improving crime prevention strategies and police cooperation. To provide comprehensive recommendations, the suggestions from participants in this consultation are complemented by the key findings of the global review.

1. Provide updated training to ensure all workforce are well equipped and knowledgeable about

a) **the data and evidence related to child sexual exploitation crimes, including challenging community attitudes and cultural beliefs on child sexual exploitation** which implies also challenging child sexual exploitation and abuse myths and their own preconceptions and stereotypes on child victims' profiles, challenges in reporting, and on offenders and the discriminatory social and cultural values, patterns, and practices that perpetuate child sexual exploitation and hinder prevention.

b) **existing policies and procedures, as well as key methodological skills to implement effective crime prevention activities.** *“They (police officers) need training on how to conduct prevention and advocacy campaigns that are effective and*

*efficient for the community” as stated by a representative of the Women and Child Protection Desk-Tubigon. Participants highlighted the following areas:*

- Trauma-informed strategies
- Gender-sensitive strategies
- Strategies to work with children with disabilities. For example, the representative of the Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons Region 3 recommended training in “American and Filipino sign language for clientele of deaf and mute.”
- *“There is specific interest on training police officers to prevent online sexual exploitation, including the manifestations of online sexual exploitation and how to communicate the risks to general population” (Representative from the Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons Region 8)*

2. **Reinforce collaboration with non-governmental organisations, other units of the child protection system and communities.** The representative of the Representative from the Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons - Region 7 provided an example of effective collaboration: *“The active participation of Regional Inter-Agency Council*

*Against Trafficking makes it beneficial and an opportunity for council members to collaborate on organising effective preventive measures. Makes our key result areas organised. There are agencies that are tasked on the prevention side, and it complements the very limited resources that is maximized in other areas.”*

The Philippines National Police are actively involved in key multisectoral coordination spaces that could enhance collaborative work. Some of these coordination spaces include:

- Local Councils of the Protection of Children
- Provincial Council for the Protection of Children
- Anti-Trafficking and Violence Against Children
- Provincial Anti-Drug Abuse Council

**3. Strengthen current practices to enhance collaboration with local leaders and community members to support changing harmful community attitudes and cultural beliefs on child sexual exploitation and abuse.** Participants highlighted that to expand the scope of the interventions there is a need to better involve local leaders, such as Barangays officials and Purok leaders, as they have direct interaction with communities. The Bohol Department of Justice explained *“The importance of capacitating the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children to*

*the referral system as they are the ones who have direct contact with community members down to the grassroots level.” “Training should be provided in the communities, tapping barangay officials, and capacitating the Violence Against Women and Children Desk as these community members know their people better. We as law enforcers need them to report to us for more proactive interventions and provide their neighbours awareness raising to saturate all communities”* (Representative from Women and Children Protection Center- Iligan City). **Such initiatives would help engaging with communities through a socially and culturally relevant approach that is localized and emphasize that the law enforcement agents are committed to the prevention of CSEA, giving it credibility and importance. This would highlight how by engaging with the community, law enforcement can help reduce victimization and re-victimization and build trust with populations, which is critical to ensure reporting and cooperation of victims.**

**4.** No prevention programme targeting potential perpetrators of child sexual abuse and exploitation was identified in this case study. While these form critical part of the overall prevention activities, they remain underdeveloped and are often ‘politically’ sensitive.

# ANNEX

**Table 1. List of participants**

No.	Institution	Participant
1	Local Government Unit of Tubigon- Municipal Social Welfare Development Office	Head of Social Welfare Department
2	Philippine National Police - Women and Children Protection Department Tubigon	Police Officer
3	Angeles Youth Development Officer EC	Officer in Charge
4	Regional Subcommittee for the welfare of children - Region 3	Planning Officer III
5	Regional Inter-Agency Council on Anti-Trafficking Pampanga - Region 3	Secretariat Member
6	Department of Social Welfare and Development (Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons) Region 3	Social Welfare Officer II
7	Bohol Crisis Intervention Centre	Manager
8	Recovery and Reintegration Program for Trafficked Persons Region 7	Social Worker II
9	Philippine National Police - Women and Children Protection Centre Bohol	Head
10	Philippine National Police - Women and Children Protection Department - Dausi	Assistant Police Officer
11	Philippine National Police - Women and Children Protection Centre- Iigan City	Chief, Women and Children Protection Department
12	Philippines Against Child Trafficking	Training and Advocacy Officer
13	Bohol Department of Justice - City Prosecutor's Office	City Prosecutor
14	Provincial Social Welfare Development Office- Laguna	Social Worker
15	Laguna Provincial Police Office	Police Officer
16	Local Committee on Anti-Trafficking and Violence Against Women and Children, Angeles City	Social Worker

