

Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse: The Role of Local Government and Comprehensive Sexual Education in Dinalupihan, Bataan



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Abstract

Some families protect their children from abusers, and some prey on their own. Intrafamilial child sexual abuse (IFCSA), a form of child sexual abuse occurring within family settings, remains a critical yet underreported issue in the Philippines. This study examines how local government agencies (LGAs) and local government units (LGUs) in Dinalupihan, Bataan, address IFCSA through the implementation of Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) in schools and communities, both pre-COVID and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it seeks to (1) illustrate LGAs' and LGUs' perceptions of IFCSA, (2) identify their programs and actions addressing IFCSA, (3) portray CSE implementation, and (4) assess collaboration in these efforts. This study involved semi-structured interviews with eight purposively selected participants, chosen based on the following criteria: (1) active LGAs or LGUs addressing IFCSA in Dinalupihan; (2) head or representative officials pre-COVID and during COVID-19; (3) officials who had encountered or managed IFCSA cases during these periods; (4) aged 18 or above; and (5) willing to provide informed consent. A qualitative case study design was employed, with data analyzed via thematic analysis, identifying patterns and underlying themes in participants' narratives. Findings reveal significant gaps in CSE implementation, limiting its effectiveness, particularly in empowering sexual minorities. Additionally, there is a need for more precise roles and stronger collaboration among agencies to improve responses to IFCSA. This study contributes insights into institutional approaches to IFCSA, offering recommendations for enhancing CSE initiatives.

Keywords

intrafamilial child sexual abuse, comprehensive sexual education, local government agencies, local government units, educational institutions

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1. Introduction

On a global scale, violence against women and children is recurring, yet at the same time, an overlooked issue that besets the personal spaces of women and children and has a massive impact on how they live their lives moving forward. However, despite being recurrent, the origins of the issue could be dated centuries ago, and it is even accepted and condoned in specific contexts. Advocates of feminism attribute violence against women to a patriarchal society that spurs male domination (Schmuhl, 2017). This issue manifests itself in different ways, such as domestic violence, sex trafficking, and even child sexual abuse (CSA). Accordingly, the issue of CSA has been considered a 'global problem' which posits a wide range of harm in both the physical and mental health of the victims (Gekoski et al., 2016a; Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). Generally, CSA is the involvement of children in sexual activities that they cannot understand, for which they are developmentally unprepared, and thus cannot give consent (Marcdante & Kliegman, 2016).

As a highly adverse experience, there is a broad consensus that intrafamilial child sexual abuse (IFCSA) is the most common form thereof, with particularly adverse consequences in both childhood and adulthood (Gekoski et al., 2016b; Hornor, 2010; Sciaraffa et al., 2017). IFCSA is a form of child sexual abuse that happens within the family unit and causes severe damage to the well-being of the victims in both the short and long term (Finkelhor et al., 2012; Gekoski et al., 2016a; Tener et al., 2021). This involves a perpetrator from the child's family, someone who is usually, although not always, living in the same house as the victims. These include parents, siblings, other blood relatives, and stepparents (Fischer & McDonald, 1998). IFCSA occurs within the family dynamic and context (McElvaney & Culhane, 2017). In the Philippines, IFCSA is a complex and alarming issue. According to the data provided by the CAMELEON Association, about 7,000,000 children are sexually abused every year in the Philippines. Over 70% of sexually abused children are between 10 and 18. Among those victims, 20% are under six years old. The incest, or IFCSA percentage, is another alarming data at 33%. However, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) disclosed that even if they have records about IFCSA, their data is far from capturing how big the issue is in the country. Similarly, in 2009, an international study from the University of Barcelona further emphasized how significantly underreported IFCSA is in the Philippines, where the official record of sexual abuse prevalence is less than 0.01% (Gutierrez & Chawla, 2017). This data underscores the urgent need for action to address IFCSA.

Therefore, disclosing such abuse early on could, among other things, help put an end to the current abuse, prevent repeated victimization, protect other children, enable psychological intervention for the children who need it, and make it possible to hold the abuser accountable (e.g., Leclerc & Wortley, 2015; Leclerc et al., 2011; Lev-Wiesel & First, 2018; McElvaney & Culhane, 2017). However, there are so many things that compromise disclosure. For instance, Filipinos are not comfortable using anatomically correct words for private parts, such as penis and vagina, as sex discussions remain to become taboos in the country. Terms are replaced by "decent" names, or worse, "pet names," e.g., vagina as cookie, cherry, or pussy, and penis as *junjun*, hotdog, or dick. Moreover, Filipinos are not open about rape or sexual assault conversations since the overwhelmingly "conservative" culture brands these as indecent. Consequently, religious beliefs continue to abstain Filipino youth from premarital sexual activities, and sex discussions remain an avenue of shame.

Subsequently, some institutions perceived as responsible for handling this issue are schools and educational institutions. Initially, the school curriculum has evolved into a repository for issues that society cannot address; it has become the responsibility of teachers to fill the gaps left by parents, social assistance organizations, public health education, and governmental regulations (Whatley & Trudeil, 1989). In addition to teaching students in the traditional areas, teachers are increasingly compelled to insulate the students from drug use, sexual activity, or, if they are already engaged in it, from becoming pregnant, catching AIDS, and being abused (Whatley & Trudeil, 1989). Regarding CSA, the incidents would then argue that the schools assume a more significant role in developing preventive and educational programs (Brassard et al., 1983).

Due to the educational institutions' consistent and longitudinal contact with children and families, it is conceived as the most promising institution for delivering preventive efforts. Correspondingly, parents are regarded as inadequate sex educators (Imber & Duke, 1984; Klein, 1983; Trudell, 1985), and sex education has become a responsibility in a country's educational systems. That being the case, the role of schools has

been emphasized. Educators believe sexuality education programs are necessary to help children prepare for upcoming stages of development, to increase comfort with the topic of sexuality, to provide responsible answers to questions and concerns that arise about sexuality, and to instill overall skills that will enable people to become responsible sexual beings (Cassell & Wilson, 1989). Generally, these arguments focus on adolescents' need for knowledge of and a healthy attitude toward human sexuality (Klein, 1983). With enough awareness, there is an expected chance of disclosure and prevention. This highlights the potential of schools in preventing IFCSA and instills hope for a better future.

In the Philippines, sex education is integrated into the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012 or the Reproductive Health (RH) Law. However, there is a consensus that embracing sex education is slow progress in the Philippines. According to the country representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to the Philippines, CSE, a "critical piece" of the RH Law, still leaves something to be desired. The emphasis from the highest level of government is missing, and it drives how everyone who works within the bureaucracy can act. Similarly, the UNFPA observes that 'there is often a wide gap between progressive national policies and program implementation at the local level' (Campbell, 2016). This underscores the need for a more progressive approach to sex education in the Philippines, making the audience feel the necessity for change.

Furthermore, for teachers already overloaded with the work required to teach physical education, the added responsibilities of sex education can be overwhelming (Trudell & Whatley, 1988). Not surprisingly, sex education is often reduced to less controversial topics such as basic reproductive anatomy and physiology, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases (Kenney & Orr, 1984). Not only that, but there seemed to be an apparent, lacking provision in sexuality education: a sexuality education that includes child sexual abuse prevention. With the focus on only addressing issues such as teenage pregnancy, infant mortality, abortion rate, HIV/AIDS cases, and high population, the failure to incorporate child sexual abuse prevention in a comprehensive sexuality education program can create very negative messages about sexuality and significantly limit the value of these curricular efforts beyond puberty (Whatley & Trudeil, 1989). The apparent compromise in sex education encapsulates the lack of efforts to prevent further child sexual abuse.

The lack of child sexual abuse prevention in a comprehensive sex education program has intended consequences. Ensuring that children receive information on the risks of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, as well as on the means to protect themselves, increases the likelihood of CSA. For instance, studies related to how children understand and report genital touch are essential, given that the child's history is most important when making decisions regarding child sexual abuse cases (Milam & Nugent, 2017). Studies reveal that children who make disclosures using incorrect terminology may not be understood and, consequently, not receive a positive, supportive response to their disclosure (Kenny et al., 2008). In contrast, disclosure using correct terminology is more likely to be understood, resulting in a more positive outcome for a child—e.g., by ending the abusive situation and obtaining therapeutic assistance (Kenny et al., 2008).

Considering the need for an efficient CSE, the study then assumed the more significant role of the Philippine government and how they mandate the LGAs and LGUs to operate such initiatives. Providing sex education



to children is regarded as the best asset any government can give to empower them for a better future (Yacob et al., 2020 & Zulkifli & Hashim, 2020). The Philippine government can solve or complicate the issue through action or inaction. It also has the authority to set standards and regulations, provide funding, and implement policies and programs that could improve educational institutions as its obligation. Correspondingly, suppose the Philippine government continues to have a lack of provision for comprehensive sex education. In that case, it may heavily affect how victims perceive issues within sex and sexuality and, in the worst case, treat sensitive issues such as IFCSA as usual, considering that their family members or close relatives are the perpetrators (Tener et al., 2021).

There is little to no discussion about an institutional perspective that seeks to examine how abuse happens. However, the usual intent is to use people for sexual exploitation, prostitution, forced labor, and other forms of servitude (Susanti et al., 2020). The work of Mabade (2015) states that a multidisciplinary team approach to addressing child sexual abuse is one of the many ways that will reduce it through citizen and community participation. LGAs and LGUs address the issue of IFCSA by implementing CSE in schools and local communities in Dinalupihan, Bataan, pre-COVID and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Primarily, the researchers believe that the collaborating LGAs and LGUs faced significant challenges concerning implementing CSE, which could address the issue of IFCSA in Dinalupihan, Bataan, during the pre-COVID and COVID-19 pandemic. Since the pandemic isolated groups or families and confined them within their homes, these were considered.

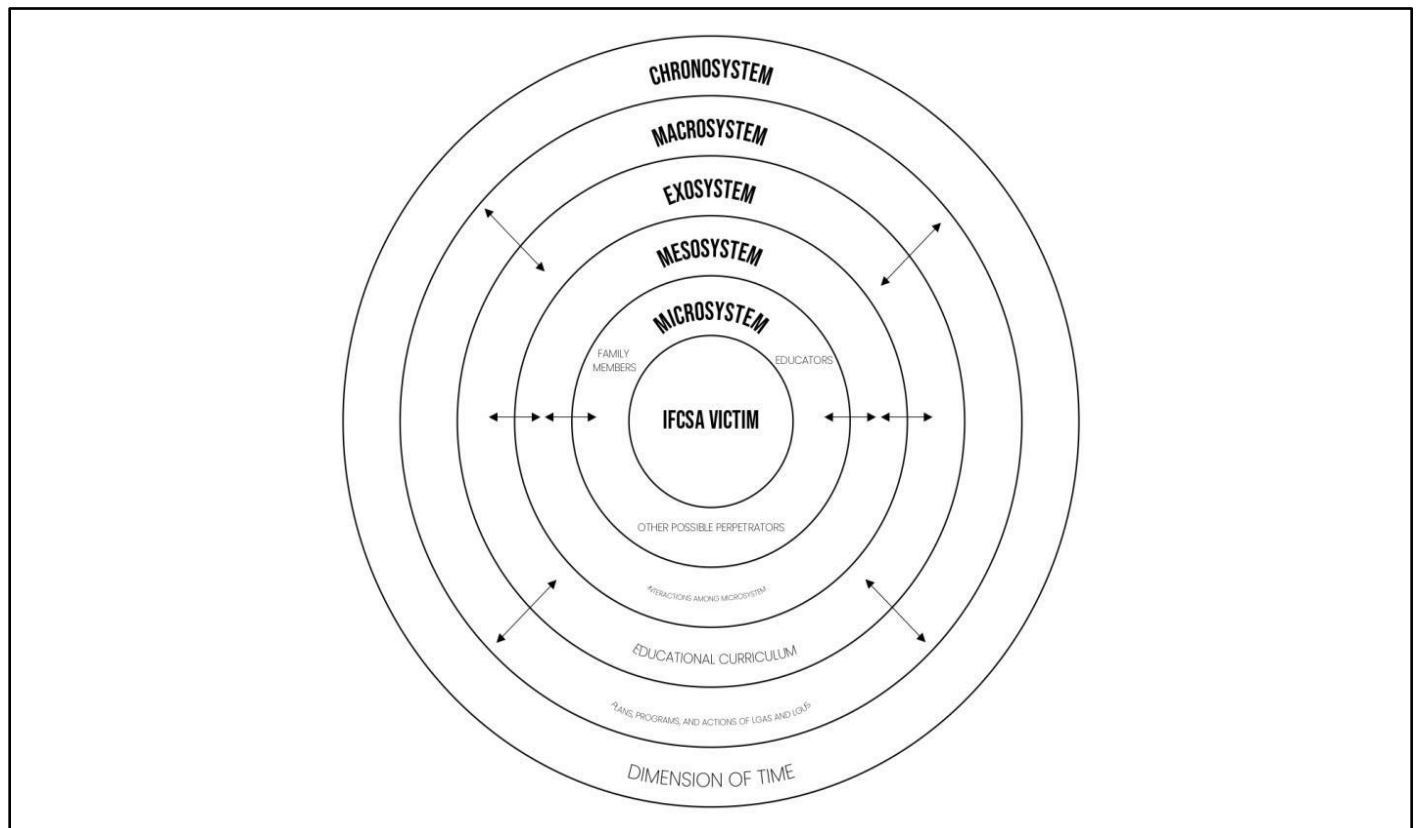


Figure 1. Ecological Systems Theory

Consistent with the researchers' proposition, intrafamilial child sexual abuse (IFCSA) can be alleviated through the implementation of Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) in schools and local communities by local government agencies (LGAs) and units (LGUs) in Dinalupihan, Bataan. The proliferation of IFCSA is driven by multiple factors, which need careful analysis to create responsive prevention mechanisms. A useful

framework for this is Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1997) Ecological Systems Theory (EST), which offers a multilevel perspective on how IFCSA occurs and how to address it (Dietrich et al., 2013; Harper et al., 2014). EST analyzes children's development within their environment, considering the interaction of various variables. This helps provide culturally and developmentally appropriate interventions (Harper et al., 2014; Padilla et al., 2010). Bronfenbrenner (1997) also recognized the importance of broader external factors impacting children, not just their immediate family or close circle (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). EST identifies five environments: (1) microsystem, (2) mesosystem, (3) exosystem, (4) macrosystem, and (5) chronosystem. In this study, EST helps explore how LGAs and LGUs in Dinalupihan can address IFCSA through CSE.

1.1 Main Subject

The survivor of IFCSA is placed at the center of this model, surrounded by various levels and settings throughout their life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Survivors share risk factors before abuse, such as being passive, depressed, or having a history of family difficulties (Ko & Cosden, 2001; Roberts & Miltenberger, 1999). CSA cases vary, but certain factors—such as race, gender, abilities, and age—can increase the likelihood of abuse.

1.2 Microsystem and Mesosystem

The microsystem refers to a child's direct environment, such as family members (who may also be perpetrators) and educators, which significantly influences their development. In the context of IFCSA, it encompasses the relationships where abuse occurs or where children learn about sex and its prevention. The mesosystem involves interactions between figures in the microsystem (e.g., family members and teachers or family and other perpetrators), which can either alleviate or exacerbate the problem. Effective interventions must address these relationships directly and should not rely solely on the justice system, which has failed to provide adequate solutions (Harper, 2014).

1.3 Exosystem

The exosystem involves indirect influences, such as the child's educational curriculum provided by LGAs and LGUs. These factors impact how children view and treat sexual abuse, even if they are not directly involved. In this study, the focus is on how CSE provided by the LGAs and LGUs shapes children's awareness of sexual abuse and prevention, enabling them to understand potential risks, even within their families. Without CSE, children would struggle to understand appropriate sexual behavior, the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unwanted pregnancy, and the risks of premarital sex (Froyum, 2010; McCarty-Caplan, 2013; Trenholm et al., 2008).

1.4 Macrosystem

The macrosystem refers to the broader societal and cultural influences on a child's development, including laws, cultural norms, and resources (Dietrich et al., 2013). This study focuses on how LGAs and LGUs in Dinalupihan address IFCSA through mechanisms like laws, policies, and CSE programs. These legal and cultural factors shape the community's response to sexual abuse, including legal protections for victims and the availability of counseling services (Department of Justice, 2016). Religious beliefs and sexual conservatism in the Philippines also play a role.



1.5 Chronosystem

The chronosystem highlights the role of time in development, including how children accumulate knowledge and skills over time to prevent or reject sexual abuse. In the case of CSA or IFCSA, the experience of abuse alters the child's interactions and development. This study examines how the timing of CSE implementation by LGAs and LGUs impacts children, both pre-COVID and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how these interventions affect the child's development.

1.6 Theory Conclusion

Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a comprehensive lens through which to view the issue of IFCSA, showing that it is influenced by multiple systems beyond the individual level. The study examines how LGAs and LGUs in Dinalupihan address IFCSA through CSE, focusing on the role of laws, policies, and time in shaping responses to the issue. By applying EST, this study offers an institutional perspective on how IFCSA continues to proliferate rather than focusing solely on individual cases.

2. Methodology

Utilizing a qualitative approach, the study determined that applying interpretive and naturalistic methods would be more fitting. It provides the research's rigor and validity and the findings' reliability. The analysis in the succeeding sections presents comprehensive data for the study.

2.1 Design

This paper utilized a qualitative approach, which helped interpret people's experiences with the world. It is a multi-method approach involving an interpretative, naturalistic study of its subject. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) noted, qualitative research involves studying phenomena in their natural settings and interpreting them based on the meanings people assign to them. This approach relied on narratives and themes as core data to understand phenomena. In this study, the approach helped extract essential narratives or personal experiences from the local LGAs and LGUs to examine how they addressed IFCSA through CSE in schools and communities in Dinalupihan, Bataan, and both pre-COVID and during the COVID-19 pandemic. These narratives have allowed the researchers to interpret the stories and generate insights.

Following a qualitative approach, the research method utilized in this study was the descriptive research method. This method allowed the researchers to define essential variables discussed in the study and focus on how things transpired. It was important as it established the foundation of the research by illustrating the study's variables and problems before exploring how they evolved. In this study, it was crucial for the researchers to clearly describe the variables, especially the implementation of CSE, which varied across the country. Proper characterization within the locality of Dinalupihan, Bataan, was essential to reduce errors in the study.

After establishing clear definitions, the study described how the challenges faced by LGAs and LGUs in implementing CSE in Dinalupihan, Bataan, unfolded. This paper used a case study research design, ideal for gaining in-depth, contextual, and naturalistic knowledge about ongoing events or phenomena in real-life contexts (Crowe et al., 2011). This approach was essential for understanding how LGAs and LGUs collaborated to address IFCSA through CSE implementation in Dinalupihan, Bataan, by exploring their experiences. Given the prevalence of IFCSA cases in Dinalupihan, the study examined the perspectives of local agencies to understand why the issue persisted. The case study design addressed simple and complex situations, helping to answer "how" questions while considering the influence of the local context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). It also provided insights into how CSE implementation impacts the disclosure of IFCSA survivors, revealing the key characteristics and implications of the case.

2.2 Data Collection

For primary data, the researchers used semi-structured interviews to gather narratives from LGAs and LGUs in Dinalupihan. This method allowed for flexibility to explore topics beyond the guide if deemed relevant, facilitating reliable qualitative data. The interview questions were open-ended to understand participants' contexts better. The use of this technique was justified, as qualitative research relied on the experiences of participants. Participants received a consent form and a list of questions in advance to ensure approval and proper interview tracking. With consent, interviews were recorded with expert guidance to ensure ethical standards and accurate data interpretation.

Additionally, secondary data, such as IFCSA records from LGAs and LGUs and documents outlining their plans and actions, were used to support evidence of the challenges faced by LGAs and LGUs in implementing CSE in Dinalupihan's schools and communities. The researchers used semi-structured interviews, combining closed and open-ended questions with follow-up probes (Adams, 2015). This approach allowed the researchers to gather detailed narratives on how LGAs and LGUs addressed IFCSA, providing insights into participants' attitudes, perceptions, and motivations relevant to the study.

2.3 Selection Criteria and Sampling

The researchers used purposive sampling, selecting participants based on specific qualities (Etikan et al., 2016). This technique was ideal for qualitative research, allowing the researchers to focus on participants with relevant experience. The study involved eight participants, chosen based on these criteria: (1) a head/representative officer/official of an active local government agency/unit addressing IFCSA in Dinalupihan, Bataan, pre-COVID and during the pandemic; (2) with experience with IFCSA cases; and (3) aged 18 or older.

2.4 Locale of the Study

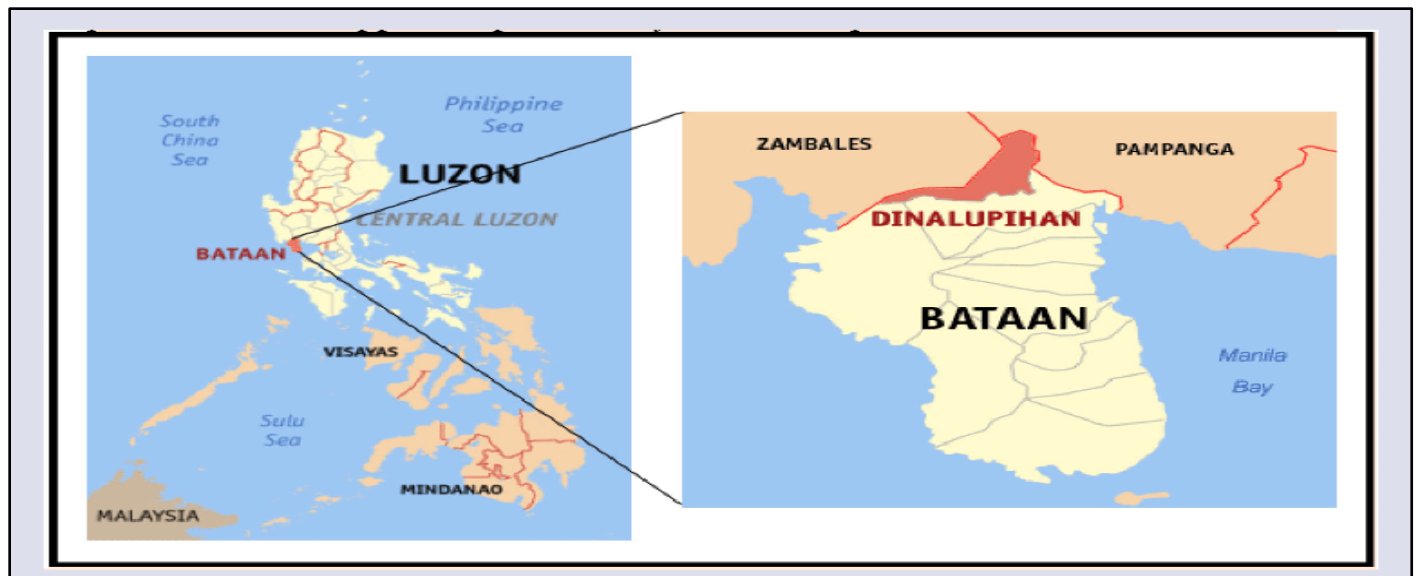


Figure 2. Map of Dinalupihan, Bataan



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The researchers had chosen Dinalupihan, Bataan, as their research locale based on two primary factors: (1) statistical evidence and (2) setting viability. Regarding statistical evidence, Dinalupihan ranked among the areas with a high incidence of IFCSA, making it a suitable location to examine the prevalence of IFCSA and assess the impact of local government agencies' responses. Dinalupihan was the second smallest municipality in Bataan, covering a land area of 9,252.73 hectares, which represented 6.7% of Bataan's total area. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2022) census, as of May 2020, the population was 118,209, projected to increase to 126,358 by 2023. Despite its relatively small land area, Dinalupihan comprises 46 Barangays, the highest number in Bataan. The municipality also hosts provincial offices such as the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), the PAG-IBIG Fund, and the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS).

Regarding setting viability, Dinalupihan was primarily an agricultural town with significant resources, including rice, sugar cane, corn, root crops, legumes, fruits, and livestock. Specifically, Dinalupihan had a rice self-sufficiency rate of 125.21%, with 4,860.50 hectares dedicated solely to rice cultivation. Digitel and Bayantel provided telecommunications services, while electricity was supplied by the Peninsula Electric Cooperative (PANELCO). The Dinalupihan water district serves 19 Barangays, with other areas relying on pumped and deep wells. According to the Bataan Provincial Government (2021), the town was also equipped with four rural health units, 48 child development centers, and 60 schools (43 public, 17 private). Most importantly, Dinalupihan has several local government agencies that could provide essential insights into IFCSA and its prevalence within the community. These agencies include the Philippine National Police - Women and Children Protection Desk (PNP-WCPD), the Municipal Social Welfare Development Office (MSWDO), Barangay Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) desks, and both private and public schools, which had relevant knowledge regarding IFCSA.

The selection of Dinalupihan was further supported by data indicating that Bataan was among the regions with a high percentage of IFCSA cases. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) reported that between 2001 and 2013, out of 4,789 recorded sexual abuse cases, 2,789 were identified as incestuous. Additionally, Region III, where Dinalupihan was located, ranks among the regions with the highest reported incest cases, totaling 589. Comparatively, the National Capital Region recorded 1,787 cases, followed by Region IV with 987 cases, Region VII with 345 cases, and Region V with 198 cases. However, the study of Quijano et al. (2021) noted that the statistics provided by the DSWD did not fully capture the prevalence of IFCSA in the country or the region, as the issue was often underreported due to its sensitive nature.

2.5 Data Analysis

This research followed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method and case study design, employing semi-structured interviews to gather data from LGAs and LGUs. Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clark (2006), was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data. This process spans data collection through transcription, reading, and re-reading, describing participants' statements to uncover underlying assumptions and meanings. This analysis would help examine how LGAs and LGUs addressed IFCSA through CSE implementation in Dinalupihan, Bataan, pre-COVID, and during the pandemic, revealing insights into their decision-making processes.

3. Results and Discussion

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to present the study's findings and address the different research questions and associated objectives. Data has been collected and presented through different themes categorized by the proponents. The involvement of different agencies and stakeholders will show how it addresses IFCSA through plans, implementations, programs, and actions from different perspectives and points of view.

3.1 Perceptions of Abuse among LGAs and LGUs

This part of the research examines how local government agencies and local government units perceive abuse in general toward IFCSA. The study participants include those who are part of the planning and implementing the policies related to IFCSA. Qualitative results show that the narratives from participants imply that there have been several interpretations of the IFCSA and that it varies per implementing agency.

3.1.1 Perceptions of IFCSA

In addressing the first objective, which explores the perceptions of local government agencies (LGAs) in Dinalupihan, Bataan, regarding incestuous family child sexual abuse (IFCSA), the researchers discovered that while all participating LGAs view IFCSA as a serious concern, their understanding varies. Although each agency has its interpretation of IFCSA, most rely more on personal assumptions than direct experience, as few have dealt with multiple IFCSA cases. One participant noted that their perception of IFCSA is

“By forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities that the child may not or may not be aware...”

Another definition will be given in the succeeding themes of the study.

3.1.2 Perpetrators of IFCSA

Participants acknowledge that family members are often the primary perpetrators of IFCSA, suggesting an understanding of the issue's familial nature. This aligns with findings from previous research, which show that such cases are usually committed by close family members, further complicating a child's ability to process and disclose the abuse. Participants saw the origin of IFCSA as such that most of the abuse or most of the victims are related to the perpetrators, involving their close relatives as major perpetrators.

3.1.3 Risk Assessment

Many participants perceive IFCSA as riskier than general CSA due to its familial context, which complicates a child's emotional and psychological response. Two specific risk factors identified include (1) the disruption of family dynamics and (2) silencing through threats. Regarding family dynamics, Stroebe et al. (2013) suggest that children often feel betrayed by family members who either ignore the abuse or choose not to intervene, potentially leading to long-term distrust. Participants also discussed the silencing tactics used by perpetrators, including threats of harm and reinforcing secrecy. Middleton (2013) found similar results, noting that many victims receive death threats from perpetrators, often their fathers or grandfathers, to ensure their silence. However, a differing view from the Barangay VAWC Desk of Barangay Zamora suggests that general CSA could be riskier than IFCSA, as strangers may feel less restraint in harming a child. One official from one barangay said:

“At least three reports came to us wherein the usual perpetrator is their boyfriend, with whom we deal with the sensitive part...”



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3.1.4 IFCSA before the COVID-19 Pandemic

Perceptions of IFCSA's prevalence before the pandemic varied. Only PNP-WCPD and Public Education representatives could provide a detailed pre-pandemic perspective, as they held their positions before COVID-19. They reported lower IFCSA rates before the pandemic, attributing this to children's increased time spent outside the home. One barangay official stated:

"It is already happening within our Barangay even before the pandemic, but victims just recently reported during the pandemic."

For the Barangay VAWC Desk and private education representatives, limited tenure or lack of cases prevented them from thoroughly assessing the pre-pandemic situation. However, they acknowledged that this lack of insight may suggest underreporting or inadequate tracking mechanisms.

3.1.5 IFCSA during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Only the PNP-WCPD and representatives from the private education sector had sufficient information to comment on IFCSA during the pandemic. According to the PNP-WCPD representative:

"Before the pandemic, there were not many incidents of abuse because people could go out. The crime rate increased during the pandemic because they could not go out. Perpetrators mostly victimized their children, siblings, or other family members, and sometimes neighbors."

They reported an increase in cases, attributing this to children's confinement at home with potential perpetrators. Similarly, the private education sector observed a significant rise in cases, from one to two before the pandemic to six to seven during the pandemic. Other participants found it challenging to assess the extent of IFCSA due to victims' limited ability to disclose abuse under lockdown conditions. This suggests that local government agencies need improved tracking and reporting systems to capture IFCSA's severity fully.

3.1.6 Challenges Faced by Victims

Beyond the COVID-19-related barriers, participants identified several challenges IFCSA victims face when attempting to disclose abuse. PNP-WCPD, MSWDO, and Private Education representatives indicated that victims are reluctant to disclose abuse due to fear of family disruption, mainly if their perpetrators are also their primary caretakers. This concern is heightened for victims from lower-income backgrounds, where family members may provide essential needs. One participant noted:

"They do not want to be blamed for causing their family to fall apart. Sometimes, and based on my experience, mothers do not believe them. As a result, they cannot disclose the abuse because even their mothers refuse to believe them."

Meanwhile, the Barangay VAWC Desk (Barangay Zamora) highlighted a lack of trust in legal authorities as another barrier, with some victims fearing their concerns will be disregarded. Hershkowitz et al. (2007) support this, noting that fear of disbelief deters children from disclosure, particularly in cases like IFCSA. Public education representatives added that victims often experience shock and denial, unable to reconcile that their family members are the abusers. Sahay (2010) illustrates that abuse by a family member inflicts deep psychological trauma, exacerbated when family protection is absent.

3.1.7 Application of EST in Perceptions of Abuse Among LGAs and LGUs

Ecological Systems Theory (EST) helps understand how LGAs and LGUs perceive abuse at different levels. At the microsystem level, perceptions are shaped by personal experiences, training, and the prevalence of IFCSA in the community. The mesosystem focuses on the interactions between local institutions—such as schools, health centers, and social services—and LGAs/LGUs, influencing their understanding of abuse. The exosystem considers external factors like government policies and community organizations, which contribute to perceptions of IFCSA. Finally, the macrosystem encompasses societal norms, values, and frameworks that shape public attitudes towards abuse and the interactions of LGAs and LGUs.

3.2 Plans, Programs, and Actions (PPAs) of LGAs and LGUs

Local government agencies and local government units have their respective PPAs to address the issue of IFCSA. This includes strengthening their roles, building capacity, and addressing specific issues surrounding the role of the said agency. It is imperative that there be no overlapping of roles and responsibilities to ensure that there are sufficient and maximized results for the potential outcomes of the PPAs.

3.2.1 Overview of LGAs and LGUs' Roles

The second objective of the study is to identify the various plans, programs, and actions (PPAs) offered by the participating local government agencies (LGAs) and local government units (LGUs). This is achieved by examining their roles, unique PPAs, and the differences in these PPAs before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings indicate that all participating LGAs and LGUs recognize their roles in addressing the issue of incestuous family child sexual abuse (IFCSA), though the challenges they encounter in fulfilling these roles vary. Each agency implements specific PPAs aligned with its responsibilities, except for Barangay VAWC Desk officers, who highlighted a need for more knowledge about their assigned duties. One officer stated:

“The role of the Anti-VAWC in the barangay is primarily to serve as a center for receiving victims. However, beyond this, no significant efforts were dedicated to prevention. We do not know.”

Notably, all agencies reported no substantial differences in the PPAs implemented before and during the pandemic, apart from adjustments in how these activities were conducted during the pandemic.

3.2.2 Similarities in the Roles of LGAs and LGUs

The roles of some LGAs in addressing IFCSA are notably similar. For instance, the PNP-WCPD and MSWDO focus on responding to complaints and conducting information drives to prevent abuse. They also demonstrate consistent coordination in handling CSA cases, particularly IFCSA. These agencies share common goals of raising awareness and providing immediate responses when a case is reported, as further elaborated in the discussion below.



3.2.3 The Role of the PNP-WCPD

One officer reiterated:

“Our main role is outlined in our vision and mission: to enforce the law, prevent and control crimes, provide emergency response, and offer support and services related to WCPD concerns, including issues affecting women and children.”

The PNP-WCPD's primary responsibilities revolve around law enforcement, crime prevention, emergency response, and providing services for women and children. These duties include conducting thorough investigations upon receiving complaints, such as gathering formal statements, filing cases, and referring victims to social workers for additional support (Cultura et al., 2017). In Dinalupihan, Bataan, the PNP-WCPD also engages in awareness campaigns like Project Barangay Empowerment on Child Abuse Resistance and Elimination, Fight Unwanted Lewd Design (BE CAREFUL), and *Kalalakihan may Pakialam sa Karahasan Laban sa Kababaihan* (KPKLK), which aim to educate the public about women's and children's rights and safety. According to the PNP-WCPD officer:

“Project BE CAREFUL aims to prevent sexual violence from happening through intensified information drives in communities with the participation of different stakeholders.”

However, these campaigns generally focus on child sexual abuse (CSA) and do not specifically address incestuous family child sexual abuse (IFCSA). The PNP-WCPD operates following the mandates set forth by Republic Act No. 8551, also known as the Philippine National Police Reform and Reorganization Act of 1998, in investigating and addressing crimes against women and children, including cases of IFCSA.

3.2.4 The Role of the MSWDO

The MSWDO's focus is on providing psychosocial intervention to help victims of IFCSA recover from their trauma. Their interventions include counseling, stress debriefing, and linking victims to other agencies offering necessary services. Additionally, MSWDO works to prevent IFCSA through information dissemination in partnership with the Local Child Protection Council (LCPC) and educational institutions in Dinalupihan.

Unlike PNP-WCPD, the MSWDO's awareness programs specifically define IFCSA, raising more awareness about this issue. The MSWDO also follows Executive Order No. 24 Series of 2022, which aims to address VAWC cases through various support services, including psychosocial support, counseling, and referrals for medical and legal examinations. However, MSWDO has identified several areas for improvement, including needing more social workers, establishing shelters for victims, a dedicated hotline for faster access to authorities, and hiring professionals to assess victims directly. As one representative stated:

“We do not have our shelter, but I hope that one day they will know there is a shelter they can turn to, or at least a hotline they can call when the weight of the abuse becomes too much to bear.”

3.2.5 Challenges with Barangay VAWC Desks

In contrast to other LGAs, Barangay VAWC Desk officers expressed that their role is limited to assisting victims in reporting crimes. One officer stated:

“Nothing much was provided to us. However, when a child comes to us, I ask if they are okay because there may be problems they cannot express.”

They have not been assigned additional responsibilities or projects related to IFCSA. As a result, the Barangay VAWC Desks have not fully integrated their designated functions, including enhancing the Barangay's capacity to address VAWC cases, improving support services, and conducting advocacy campaigns to protect women's and children's rights.

3.2.6 The Role of Educational Institutions

Both public and private schools recognized the importance of their role in addressing IFCSA, as they serve as a second home for children. Their primary responsibility is information dissemination, which aligns with the child protection policy. Schools have launched women's and children's rights empowerment programs and awareness campaigns, including symposiums for children, seminars for teachers and parents, and distributing informational materials. Additionally, one participant mentioned:

"As with any CSA-related concerns, new teachers receive an orientation on sexual harassment and how to handle it, which also extends to non-teaching personnel."

These initiatives align with the Department of Education's (DepEd) directives, particularly DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, which establishes a framework for child protection and addresses various forms of abuse, including CSA and VAWC. The order emphasizes the need for preventive and protective actions in schools, such as training school staff, students, and parents in handling abuse situations and fostering positive peer relationships.

3.2.7 Integration of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)

Both public and private schools also expressed the need for integrating Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), particularly in educating children about their bodies and rights. However, the implementation of CSE has been slow, with both public and private schools focusing primarily on reproductive health and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). While some teachers touch on broader topics such as body parts and bodily autonomy, the integration of CSE remains inconsistent across institutions. The slow progress of CSE integration in the Philippines has been widely acknowledged, as noted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) representative to the Philippines, who described it as a "critical piece" of the Reproductive Health Law.

"Right now, we are following a standard curriculum from DepEd (Department of Education), which is not explicit about these topics. It is incorporated in MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health), but Comprehensive Sexual Education cannot be packaged as one set or unit. At least we still cover parts of the reproductive system in science and discuss HIV in Health. However, we have not yet taught contraception or personal safety. There have been standard modules in the past that schools could adopt, but we do not have those. In Catholic education, they have specifically designed an approach, but we must also consider the limitations of the church on these issues. Again, it burdens us to come up with a solution. Let us be honest with ourselves—if there is a problem, tell us the protocols and what we should teach, given our responsibilities to the children. We are not MSWDO; we are a school."



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This reflects the ongoing challenges schools face in fully implementing CSE and underscores the need for more precise guidance and support in addressing these critical topics.

3.2.8 Differences Between Public and Private Schools

A significant difference between public and private schools lies in the resources available to students. Private schools are staffed with licensed guidance counselors who can address students' concerns more accommodatingly. In contrast, public schools lack guidance counselors, which may limit the support they can provide. Public schools occasionally collaborate with LGUs on women's and children's programs, while private schools do not engage in such partnerships. As mentioned by one of the principals in a public school:

"From time to time, the PNP visits our schools. They conduct educational sessions for the learners. Regarding counseling, we do not have full-time guidance counselors in elementary schools; instead, we have guidance designates. As you can see, we lack specialized expertise. I believe the MSWDO can provide this assistance, along with the necessary experts."

3.2.9 Application of EST in Plans, Programs, and Actions of LGAs and LGUs

Local government agencies directly influence the planning process at the microsystem level, shaping programs that address IFCSA based on their understanding of abuse. The mesosystem emphasizes collaboration between these agencies and local stakeholders (e.g., educational, health, and welfare institutions) to amplify these programs. The exosystem highlights the impact of external factors, such as national policies and support from the national government, on the response to abuse. Finally, the macrosystem includes cultural and legal factors that influence the programs undertaken by LGAs and LGUs.

3.3 Implementation of CSE by LGAs and LGUs

Child Sexuality Education plays a significant role in preventing IFCSA. This theme provides an aspect of how educational institutions collaborate with LGAs and LGUs towards implementing and including CSEs within their school policies and even curriculum. It shows that despite the efforts made by educational institutions for both public and private, there is still a lack of monitoring and evaluation systems to sustain the initiative.

3.3.1. Integration of CSE in Lesson Plans

One of the efforts of local government agencies (LGAs) and local government units (LGUs) in implementing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is the integration of CSE topics into the lesson plans in schools. This includes lessons on reproductive health, gender equality, and children's rights to create a more informed and empowered youth. However, despite this integration, the actual delivery of CSE has been inconsistent, with some schools struggling to implement the curriculum entirely. One principal stated:

"CSE is integrated into the child protection policy and is included in different subjects like Science, specifically during lessons about the reproductive system where students learn how to protect themselves."

CSE is integrated into lesson plans but not directly taught as a specific subject. Another principal confirmed:

"CSE is integrated but lacking in elementary schools. Teachers sometimes hesitate on how to teach the material effectively and end up integrating it into lessons about the reproductive system."

3.3.2. School Visitations for CSA Awareness

As part of their CSA awareness programs, LGAs and LGUs have carried out school visitations, including talks and workshops on children's rights and sexual abuse prevention. These visitations are intended to raise awareness among students and encourage them to report cases of abuse. The programs have been well-received, with positive feedback from students and teachers, although there is a recognized need for further outreach and engagement. The PNP-WCPD conducts lectures and distributes flyers to raise awareness about CSA. However, as noted by its officer:

"The content of these lectures and flyers is limited to the general topic of CSA and does not address IFCSA specifically."

Further, the MSWDO also conducts National Children's Month seminars to encourage barangay officials to strengthen their barangay child protection units. They cooperate with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) to conduct lectures and seminars. As one noted:

"The content of these seminars varies, but some include information on different types of abuse, including IFCSA."

3.3.3. Shift to Online CSE during the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the delivery of CSE transitioned to online platforms, with schools and LGUs adapting by holding webinars, distributing educational materials online, and hosting virtual counseling sessions. As evidenced by the statements of PNP-WCPD, they started conducting online lectures and dialogues instead of in-person school visits to reach a broader audience. They also used social media to post awareness campaigns, particularly regarding online sexual abuse, to help students protect themselves from online predators. However, one participant emphasized that "the materials used for these online lectures often came from the internet and not the agency itself," indicating a lack of resources. However, this shift has presented challenges such as access to the internet and technological resources, which were especially difficult for students in rural areas. Despite these barriers, the online shift allowed for continued education on CSA and sexual health.

3.3.4. Counseling Programs and Responsible Parenting Seminars

In addition to CSE integration, LGAs and LGUs also implemented counseling programs to provide psychological support to CSA victims. Responsible parenting seminars were also conducted to empower parents with the knowledge and skills to protect their children from abuse. These seminars were crucial in fostering a collaborative approach between schools, communities, and local authorities to prevent CSA. For example, one authority said that to enhance responsible parenting:

"In public schools, they have a child policy, a child protection policy, inviting lawyers to talk, especially during parent-teacher association meetings..."



3.3.5. Non-Implementation of CSE by Certain LGUs

While many LGUs have made strides in implementing CSE, some have faced challenges in rolling out the program. These challenges include a lack of trained teachers, limited resources, and resistance from specific local communities. Some LGUs reported not implementing CSE at all due to these barriers, which have resulted in gaps in education on sexual rights and abuse prevention. For instance, one Barangay VAWC desk officer stated they could not implement CSE because they lacked proper order and resources. They believe that “the higher government should first invest in improving educational and Barangay facilities before implementing CSE.”

3.3.6 Application of EST in the Implementation of CSE by LGAs and LGUs

At the microsystem level, teachers, health workers, and leaders enact CSE within their communities, directly impacting how students/constituents value sexual education. The mesosystem observes how interactions between educational institutions, healthcare centers, and community organizations are vital for effective CSE implementation. At the exosystem level, external policies, such as national funding or educational standards, affect the resources available for CSE. The macrosystem considers national legal frameworks and societal acceptance of sexual education in the Philippines, which are crucial for successful implementation.

3.4. Collaboration of LGAs and LGUs in Addressing IFCSA Through the Implementation of CSE

Apart from the usual generic collaboration of LGAs and LGUs through their PPAs, they also coordinate the implementation of CSE to address IFCSA within Dinalupihan, Bataan. This is to examine and analyze if there are overlapping duties and responsibilities within the authorizing government agencies regarding addressing the IFCSA within the Local Government Unit.

3.4.1. Overview of Collaboration in Addressing IFCSA

The fourth objective of the study focuses on determining the collaboration between LGAs and LGUs in implementing CSE in schools and local communities in Dinalupihan, Bataan. The findings reveal that while there is collaboration in addressing cases of IFCSA, the collaboration, specifically through the implementation of CSE, is limited. Most collaboration primarily revolves around referral systems, where cases of CSA or IFCSA are transferred to agencies specializing in their management. Only a few agencies, like MSWDO, have expressed a more direct collaboration in providing CSE. An officer stated:

“We have our Local Council for Protection of Children (LCPC) in the municipality, which handles children’s and women’s rights. We also attend and organize seminars inviting barangays, local PNP, and other offices.”

3.4.2. Collaboration of PNP-WCPD and Other LGAs/LGUs

The PNP-WCPD has collaborated with several LGAs and LGUs to address IFCSA. These include the Municipal Council, MSWDO, and general LGUs. Specifically, the Municipal Council initiated programs to prevent child abuse, such as efforts to “enhance primary care within the community.” Additionally, the PNP-WCPD collaborates with MSWDO to provide behavioral parent training for the care of victims within family environments. Furthermore, PNP-WCPD coordinates with other LGUs, ensuring that cases are transferred to the appropriate authorities for follow-up. The WCPD officer stated:

“We are also a member of the municipal council for preventing child abuse and neglect, so in order to enhance primary care within the community, behavioral parent training activities for those who become survivors, we have programs just like the DSWD for the survivors and victims of sexual abuse.”

This collaboration aligns with the Child Protection Policy (CPP), specifically the Code of Conduct for Working with Children, which emphasizes prioritizing the well-being and rights of the child.

3.4.3. The Role of MSWDO in Referral Systems and CSE Implementation

The MSWDO plays a central role in the referral systems for IFCSA cases, collaborating with multiple LGAs and LGUs. They work with the Local Council for the Protection of Children (LCPC), PNP, barangays, and public schools. The MSWDO also partners with the Municipal Health Office (MHO) to incorporate CSE into the curriculum. However, CSE is not fully integrated; it is only included in subjects like health and science, specifically when discussing reproductive systems.

Additionally, MSWDO collaborates with the PNP for psychosocial intervention and referrals to other agencies like the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) for medical support. MSWDO's commitment to the Committee for the Special Protection of Children (CSPC) is clear, with procedures like home visits and medico-legal referrals following the proper protocol for handling child abuse cases (Committee for the Special Protection of Children, 2014). Their representative expressed:

"While our process of handling IFCSA cases may not be perfect, we noticed that there has to be a continuous improvement and upgrade, especially to our social workers, given that there are now new trends and methods being reported to us."

3.4.4. Limited Collaboration of Barangay VAWC Desks

Barangay VAW Desk officers face limitations in collaborating with other LGAs and LGUs. They primarily collaborate with the PNP in handling IFCSA cases. For instance, Barangay Burgos collaborates with the PNP-WCPD and, according to the officer, "ensures the confidentiality of cases by handling reports in closed-door meetings." They also acknowledge that they lack the capacity to address IFCSA. On the other hand, Barangay Zamora admitted that they had little to no collaboration with other agencies concerning the implementation of CSE. One officer also stated they are "limited to reporting cases to the PNP-WCPD." Despite these challenges, both Barangay Burgos and the PNP have consistently prioritized the confidentiality and privacy of victims per the Child Protection Policy (CPP).

3.4.5. The Role of Private Educational Institutions

Private educational institutions have reported collaborations with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in handling cases of general CSA. However, they believe this collaboration has not been intensive enough, as they still perform the briefing and debriefing processes themselves. The CSPC recommends that the DSWD take the lead in briefing, debriefing, and conducting medico-legal exams to ensure victim safety. The private education sector's claim of substandard collaboration highlights the need for more effective coordination in handling CSA and IFCSA cases, as noted by an educational administrator:

"We are for the safety of the child, so we are duty-bound to report, especially if it is penetrative sex, there is a risk of physical assault."



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3.4.6. Collaboration in Public Educational Institutions

Both public and private schools in Dinalupihan engage in different forms of collaboration to implement CSE. Public schools often collaborate with the MSWDO for referrals related to CSA. They prioritize confidentiality when handling these cases. Public schools also collaborate with the PNP-WCPD, which conducts lectures and dialogues within the schools about general CSA concerns. Educational institutions are seen as key players in reporting sexual abuse cases. On the other hand, private schools also collaborate to address IFCSA. They often report cases of IFCSA to the DSWD. Additionally, private schools work with the PNP-WCPD, allowing them to conduct lectures and dialogues about general. However, a participant from a private school noted that “collaborations with DSWD were mostly ‘curative’ rather than preventive.” They also expressed that they are responsible for the DSWD, such as the parents’ and victims’ briefing and debriefing process. Although not explicitly mandated in the CPP, this collaboration marks a step forward in addressing IFCSA cases in Dinalupihan. The varying levels of collaboration among public and private schools indicate the need for a more cohesive approach to CSE implementation.

3.4.7 Application of EST in the Collaboration of LGAs and LGUs in Addressing IFCSA through the Implementation of CSE

At the microsystem level, communication and relationships between government officials, social workers, educators, and healthcare providers are essential for creating an impactful response to IFCSA. The mesosystem focuses on collaboration among key players—LGAs/LGUs, educational institutions, NGOs, and the justice system—to implement CSE effectively in addressing IFCSA. The exosystem considers national policies, funding, intergovernmental agreements, and local efforts in tackling IFCSA. Finally, the macrosystem observes how national policies protecting children or mandating CSE support collaboration at the local level.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

To conclude, the study has revealed that LGAs and LGUs faced various challenges concerning implementing the CSE. It shows how much improvement is needed for the LGAs and LGUs, as they have yet to fully tap their capacities and potential in filling their roles to this problem. It is also important to consider that the crucial participation of citizens is important to showcase full cooperation, proper identification, and problem-solving for addressing the issue of IFCSA.

This study examined how LGAs and LGUs in Dinalupihan, Bataan, address IFCSA by implementing CSE in schools and local communities before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings indicate that while agencies recognize IFCSA as a critical issue, gaps in knowledge, limited resources, and inconsistent CSE application hinder effective intervention. These limitations underscore the need for improved collaboration, tracking, and targeted educational programs to enhance protection for at-risk children in the community.

While PNP-WCPD fulfills its role under the Philippine National Police Reform and Reorganization Act of 1998, improvements are necessary to make information drives more effective in addressing IFCSA. A focused approach is recommended, with time slots and objectives dedicated to educating communities on family-based risks, victim empowerment, and the support available through PNP-WCPD.

To enhance psychosocial support for IFCSA victims, MSWDO should increase its staff of social workers, establish a hotline for emergency assistance, and create a shelter for victims who cannot return home. These measures will provide safe spaces and immediate support, aiding victims’ recovery from long-term trauma.

To better address IFCSA, Barangays should be empowered as first responders through training and resources. This includes conducting information drives on IFCSA risks, providing immediate support to remove victims from unsafe homes, and assisting with legal and medical needs. Partnerships with NGOs can supplement resources and expertise.

While schools comply with DepEd's child protection policies, they must fully integrate CSE into their curriculum, focusing on bodily rights and IFCSA awareness. Public schools require additional guidance counselors to support students' emotional well-being, and both public and private schools should strengthen collaboration with LGUs on protective initiatives.

By implementing these recommendations, LGAs, LGUs, and educational institutions can enhance their collective efforts to prevent and address IFCSA, ensuring stronger protections for at-risk children in Dinalupihan.

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