Research And Response To Online Sexual Exploitation Of Children OSEC Amidst COVID-19 In The Philippines

PHILIPPINES

Research Institutions:
World Hope International; University of Southern Philippines Foundation.

Principal Investigator:
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PROJECT AIM:
The project’s overall aim is improved therapeutic care for survivors of OSEC in the Philippines through specialized training for caregivers, provision of care for OSEC survivors, and to produce research to inform the general practices of care and policies on the unique challenges and trauma associated with OSEC, particularly in a time of a global pandemic.

Specifically, the objectives include improved understanding of the impact of OSEC and its interaction with COVID in the Philippines through research and reporting; increased capacity and knowledge among care providers (social workers, psychologists, counselors) in providing therapeutic care for OSEC survivors; and provision of therapeutic care to children and families impacted by OSEC.

The research will employ a descriptive mixed-method design collecting quantitative data utilizing standardized instruments in assessing the survivors and qualitative data through semi-structured interviews to uncover the phenomenological perspective of the families and care-providers. This will provide a holistic overview of the intersection of OSEC and COVID-19.

STUDY CONTRIBUTION:
The need for evidence-based interventions is imperative to ensure effective clinical care for the survivors. The research will shed light on the impact of OSEC victimization on the mental well-being of survivors and the vulnerabilities of the families that engaged in OSEC. Knowledge of the families’ lived experiences will advance the understanding of this emerging form of trafficking beyond the figures. It will provide insight on how to better provide clinical care for tailored fit to OSEC survivors and their families especially during a global pandemic that is impacting the economic, psychological, and social well-being of people. Thus, social workers, counselors, and psychologists handling OSEC survivors will be trained on specialized trauma treatment protocols.

A deeper analysis of the OSEC phenomenon will facilitate crafting of evidence informed policies to stop the proliferation of sexual exploitation of children in the Philippines.

These compounding factors has made the country especially susceptible to OSEC crimes. It has been identified as the global epicenter of OSEC by UNICEF in 20161.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought disruptions in the lives of people around the world, forcing people to stay at home, increasing online activities. The Philippines is experiencing an economic downturn caused by very restrictive lockdowns. The pandemic has consequently facilitated a more conducive environment and it increased vulnerabilities resulting to threefold rise in OSEC prevalence.

CONTEXT:
The advancement of digital technology has brought tremendous positive changes to society, but it has also created new risks and crimes for children. Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC) is an emerging form of exploitation and child sexual abuse that occurs virtually, on websites, applications and social media platforms. It includes the manufacturing and distribution of materials online that contain child abuse images, the grooming of child victims online with the purpose of sexual exploitation or abuse, as well as live-streaming of child sexual exploitation and abuse.

In the Philippines, more than half of the population has easy access to the Internet. There is also high rate of poverty combined with English proficiency. These compounding factors has made the country especially susceptible to OSEC crimes. It has been identified as the global epicenter of OSEC by UNICEF in 2016.


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