

School-Based Psychosocial Intervention Program for Disaster-Related Trauma in Albay, Philippines

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Abstract

This study aimed to design a school-based psychosocial intervention program for disaster-related trauma in Albay as a psychosocial support to promote mental health in times of disasters. Likewise, this study aimed to prepare a module for the program developed, and present the proposed program using the module for preparedness and response. Developmental-evaluative method of research through expert panel evaluation, survey, interview techniques, and workshop sessions as well as focused group discussion (FGD) were utilized to gather data. Respondents and key informants were guidance practitioners, psychologists and teacher-advisers of secondary schools in the province of Albay, Philippines. The proposed school-based psychosocial intervention program was evaluated by the expert panel as adequate and relevant based on the felt needs of the educational institutions and was recommended for implementation. Survey of guidance practitioners and teachers of pilot school revealed outstanding results as to the content and relevance of the workshop topics, expertise of speakers, and appropriateness of workshop activities. FGD revealed a common theme to empower school heads to support the program through budget allocation and conduct more trainings for effective implementation of the program. Registered guidance counselors, in a random interview, were highly responsive to their commitment to replicate the program with the support of the school administration. The proposed school-based psychosocial intervention program is recommended for implementation and replication in other educational institutions.

Keywords: *disaster and trauma, resilience, school-based psychosocial intervention program*

Introduction

Building resilience among young people and children is imperative as they are the most vulnerable population who are faced with different life adversities needing adequate attention and intervention. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2017) estimated that around 20% of the world's adolescents have a mental health or behavioral problem wherein up to 50% of cases have their onset during the period of adolescence. Hence, WHO (2011) has articulated that any neglect of psychosocial support during critical incidents could impair any efforts of physical rehabilitation and it must be appropriate, culturally sensitive, and should be provided by trained workers who understand the needs of disaster survivors.

As educational institutions are commonly regarded as dominant providers of mental health services for youth, the goal of integration of mental health services through psychosocial intervention program

to education are both shared by many educators and mental health practitioners (Farmer *et al.*, 2005). The goal of psychosocial intervention program is to improve one or more of the following outcomes: to reduce the impact of stressful events and situations, decrease distress and disability, minimize symptoms, improve the quality of life, reduce risk, improve communication and coping skills, and/or enhance treatment adherence (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (Great Britain), National Institute for Health, Clinical Excellence, 2011).

UNICEF (2016) affirmed that many studies recognize that psychosocial support given to children and adolescents provide stability, structure, and routine that they need to cope with loss, fear, stress, and violence. Moreover, Mattingly (2017) stated that psychosocial support in schools offer students a safe, stable environment and help restore a sense of normality, dignity, and hope by providing both some structure and supportive activities along with social

and emotional learning.

According to Gibbs and colleagues (2013), the impact of disasters on the mental health, well-being, and social inclusion of children and young people is well established. However, despite recognition of the important role of schools in supporting children and young people in post-disaster, the analysis of initiatives indicated that there was limited external funding support for school-based programmes.

The study of Vranda (2015) concluded that school-based intervention program has been increasingly recognized as effective means of promoting mental health of students and prevent the development of unhealthy behavior. This was supported by the survey of Foster and colleagues (2005) on school-based mental health programs which indicated that a vast majority of programs provide “pull-out” screening and counseling services to referred students, which are resource intensive and often compete with instructional time. Similarly, in the study of Baker and colleagues (2006), the “clinic within schools” model provides opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration between mental health providers and educators. Moreover, the findings of Dhital and colleagues (2019) suggests that training school teachers for psychosocial support is feasible and useful in low-resource and disaster-prone settings.

In the Philippines, as one of the countries with the highest risks to disaster, the issues regarding mental health of children in disaster-affected areas has emerged. Recently, the findings of Usami and colleagues (2018) revealed that in the Philippines, there is a need to integrate the psychosocial preparedness in schools and community activities since the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) activities is more focused on the physical preparedness like evacuation, drills, and procurement of life-saving equipment. Likewise, there is a need to come up with a program involving the Department of Education (DepEd), Local Government Units (LGUs), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Health (DOH), and other external agencies providing mental health services in order to sustain the provision of psychosocial support.

Bicol is known as one of the disaster prone regions in the Philippines as being in the typhoon belt. Albay ranks first in terms of natural disasters due to the devastations of typhoons Milenyo (Xangsane) and Reming (Durian) in 2006 and many others such as volcanic eruptions, landslides, and floods. In 2014–

2015, a baseline study assessed the existing psychosocial intervention programs implemented by the secondary schools in Albay through its school counseling programs (Roallos, 2016).

The result of the baseline study indicated that the psychosocial intervention resources are inadequate in terms of qualified guidance personnel and trainings, psychological assessment tools, administrative, faculty and parents support, financial resources, and linkages to external agencies and specialists. The identified intervention activities were individual counseling and group guidance activities on drug abuse prevention, anti-bullying, abuse prevention, climate change adaptation, conflict and anger management, developing life skills and decisions, and responsible courtship, marriage, and sexuality. The strengths of the identified intervention activities were preventive, responsive, and the high motivation and commitment of guidance personnel despite weaknesses in intervention resources. Opportunities identified were a chance to upgrade on special trainings, to establish external linkages, to offer scholarships for guidance counselors, and to revisit the budget allocation of institutions to overcome the threats on the legal provisions in the practice of profession.

This research on the proposed school-based psychosocial intervention program for disaster trauma was conceived based from the result of the baseline study. This study aimed to develop a psychosocial intervention program for educational institutions in Albay. Specifically, the study aimed to (1) design a psychosocial intervention program for disaster trauma based on the existing practices for preparedness and response; (2) design and prepare module for the intervention program developed and; (3) present the psychosocial intervention program using the module for school counseling program.

Materials and Methods

This developmental research involved series of workshop-trainings for 49 guidance practitioners in 154 secondary schools in Albay—both private and public—who were also respondents for the FGD, and the 49 teacher-advisers of the chosen pilot school. Further, 12 registered guidance counselors were randomly chosen for interview to evaluate the features of the proposed intervention program.

The analysis of the proposed psychosocial intervention program covered the six components

corresponding to each of the six workshop sessions and was based from the experts' evaluation and the participants' survey of the workshop-trainings conducted in terms of content, appropriateness, and relevance. Interview was conducted with some randomly selected practicing licensed and registered guidance counsellors to determine feedback and recommendations on the proposed program for implementation as well as the panel of experts for critiquing the draft of the proposed program. FGD was also conducted among workshop participants to determine the insights, felt needs and challenges, and recommendations in the implementation of the program for improvement.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency, weighted mean and percentage were used to describe the components of the proposed psychosocial intervention program.

Results and Discussion

Design of the School-Based Psychosocial Intervention Program for Disaster Trauma

The program, with its session topics, was designed based on the needs assessment conducted among different schools in Albay, which surfaced from the previous study conducted (Roallos, 2016). The initial draft of the proposed program was presented to the expert panel of psychologists for evaluation reflecting the six session topics that were conducted in a series of workshop trainings. Major experts' evaluation included the following: (1) inclusion of stress debriefing, positive psychology, and mindfulness in enhancing resilience; (2) removal of anger management; and (3) giving premium to workshops during sessions. The trainings aimed to equip the guidance practitioners and teacher-advisers with psychosocial intervention skills. The design of the module developed was mainly based on the six session topics of the proposed schoolbased psychosocial intervention program (SPIP). It was developed to serve as learning session guide for guidance practitioners and to assist them in facilitating the SPIP. The six session topics are summarized in Table 1 incorporating the experts recommendations.

Survey Evaluation of the Workshop Topics for Guidance Practitioners

The workshop-training entailed a two-day session for guidance practitioners covering all the six session

topics presented and a one-day initial workshop session at the pilot school, the Taysan Resttlement Integrated School in Legazpi City.

The data (Table 2) show that the topics per session as rated by the participants were all outstanding with a total mean score of 4.82. The result of the survey evaluation implies that the workshop-training has met the expectations of the workshop participants in terms of the content and relevance of the session topics on the issue of psychosocial intervention scarcity, the expertise of the resource speakers, and the appropriateness of the workshop activities provided per session. This is likewise supported by the positive comments and commendation provided by the workshop participants for having a very substantial and meaningful free workshop-training with comprehensive and relevant topics for the proposed program.

Data (Table 3) likewise show that the two workshop session topics conducted to the pilot school were also both outstanding with a total mean score of 4.75. Result implies that the workshop-training conducted to the pilot school has exceeded the participants' expectations. Moreover, participants eagerly expected for more training sessions in the future with more interactive activities, materials, and time allotment for workshop activities.

The results concurred with the result of random interview conducted with some registered guidance counselors stating that the program was very relevant and appropriate for the needs of the community which must be implemented and replicated to various secondary schools. Likewise, respondents attested that there is really a need for this type of workshop-trainings to implement the program effectively with the full support of the teachers and the school administration specifically in terms of budgetary requirement.

The analysis of FGD data has considered three categories: (1) insights gained from the orientation on how to the conduct and implement the proposed program through a series of workshop-training on the program components, (2) the felt needs and challenges of the proposed program, and (3) the recommended or needed intervention based from the felt needs and challenges. Two things surfaced during the orientation program. The first was the significance of acquiring concrete knowledge of the basic principles and concepts of psychosocial response through psychological first aid, basic trauma intervention, management and coping with stresses, coping with bereavement and loss as well

Table 1. Summary of Session Topics.

Session Topic	Description
I - Introduction to School-Based Psychosocial Intervention Program	This session provides the basic and general principles in understanding the goals and importance of psychosocial intervention program for disaster trauma and other critical incidents in the school setting targeting children and adolescents as the primary recipients. It also describes the general guidelines for schools during preparedness, response, and recovery stages of disaster.
II - Psychosocial Intervention Through Psychological First Aid and Stress Debriefing	This session aims to conduct Psychological First Aid (PFA) as a psychosocial response following a disaster or any critical incidents. It also has guidelines and protocol in facilitating PFA to survivors.
III - Trauma Intervention Through Expressive Techniques	This session handles the basic concepts and knowledge in understanding the feelings of traumatized children and the needed intervention through expressive techniques appropriate for children and adolescents following disaster and other critical incidents. It includes guidelines in using basic expressive techniques to employ in assisting children to externalize their feelings, emotions, and their experiences.
IV - Coping with Loss, Bereavement, and Grief Through Stress Management	This session includes an overview of the main issues relating to loss, bereavement, and grief due to loss of a loved one following a disaster or any critical incident. It also gives the basic concepts about the stages and phases of grief, managing grief, and how to support children and adolescents to cope with their loss and grief.
V - Enhancing Resilience Through Mindfulness and Positive Psychology	This session tackles the basic concept and knowledge about resilience and how to develop the ability to deal with the psychological impact of disaster among children and adolescents by identifying factors and resources involved in resilience and the role that thinking plays in overcoming inevitable stress and adversity of life.
VI - Closure and Moving Forward	This session has the basic concepts about closing group sessions in counselling by integrating activities that will help enable participants to redirect their life goals and make decisions to move forward in their journey of life after experiencing and overcoming inevitable stress and adversities of life.

Table 2. Survey on the Workshop-Training Session Topics for the Guidance Practitioners

Session Topic	Speaker	Topic Content	Workshop Activity	Relevance of Topic	Overall Mean	Interpretation
I – Orientation to Psychosocial Intervention Program	4.80	4.80	4.75	4.75	4.80	Outstanding
II – Responding After a Disaster (PFA/CISD)	4.90	4.92	4.95	4.90	4.92	Outstanding
III – Trauma Intervention	4.85	4.85	4.90	4.80	4.85	Outstanding
IV- Coping with Loss	4.75	4.75	4.80	4.80	4.78	Outstanding
V-Enhancing Resilience	4.80	4.80	4.80	4.75	4.79	Outstanding
VI-Closure Intervention	4.80	4.80	4.80	4.75	4.79	Outstanding
Overall Mean	4.82	4.82	4.82	4.79	4.82	Outstanding

Legend:
 4.6–5.0 Excellent/Outstanding
 4.1–4.5 Very Satisfactory
 3.0–4.0 Satisfactory
 2.1–2.9 Unsatisfactory
 1.0–2.0 Fair

Table 3. Survey on the Workshop-Training Session Topics to the Pilot School

Session Topic	Speaker	Topic Content	Workshop Activity	Relevance of Topic	Overall Mean	Interpretation
I – Responding After a Disaster (PFA/CISD)	4.80	4.80	4.70	4.80	4.78	Outstanding
II–Trauma Intervention Through Expressive Techniques	4.80	4.70	4.70	4.70	4.72	Outstanding
Total	4.80	4.75	4.70	4.75	4.75	Outstanding

Legend:

4.6–5.0 *Excellent/Outstanding*

4.1–4.5 *Very Satisfactory*

3.0–4.0 *Satisfactory*

2.1–2.9 *Unsatisfactory*

1.0–2.0 *Fair*

as enhancing resilience. The second is the significance of having a research-based structured program guided by a module for effective implementation. Hence, acquiring appropriate knowledge and information through workshop-training gives one a high level of self-confidence to respond during critical incidents and deliver the program effectively.

For the second category, which is the felt needs and challenges of the proposed program being faced by the practitioners, the result revealed also three major themes: (1) having too much workload (as faculty and as guidance designate), (2) lack of support from the faculty and school head, and (3) the lack of budget allocation. It was noted that the challenges described by the participants somehow impeded their ability to work effectively. Support from colleagues and school head could lead to budget allocation for the program as well as opportunity for advance training to equip the guidance practitioners with knowledge and skills. Further, there is the need to (1) create core groups for the participants to serve as support group in the replication of the proposed program in their respective schools, (2) empower the school heads through a conference and present the proposed program in order to enjoin their teachers' support and to allocate budget for the implementation of the program, and (3) establish external linkages for the sustainability of the program. Therefore, it can be noted that the support of the school administration and teachers, the core group of practitioners and external linkages could lead to sustained and effective implementation of the program.

The findings of the study support the findings of Dhital and colleagues (2019), which suggests training school teachers for psychosocial support is feasible

and useful in low-resource and disaster-prone settings. Moreover, the findings on the challenges on the lack of school head and teachers' support and the need to establish external linkages supports the findings of Usami and colleagues (2018). There is a need to come up with a psychosocial intervention program involving the DepEd and parents, and external agencies like the LGUs, DSWD, DOH, and other agencies providing mental health services in order to provide continuity and sustainability in providing psychosocial support.

This result is likewise supported by the Program Logic Model theory of Weiss (1998) and Wholey (1994). The model sets out a series of outcomes/impacts, explaining in more detail the logic of how an intervention program contributes to intended or observed results. This includes assumptions (the beliefs of prospective grantees about the program), the people involved, the context and the way the prospective grantees think whether the program will work, as well as external factors, consisting of the environment in which the program exists, and a variety of external factors that interact with and influence the program action.

Finally, the result likewise jived into the conceptual framework of the proposed intervention program which covers the three phases of intervention (preparedness, response, and post intervention). The creation of institutional assistance flow requires the availability and completion of the psychosocial team and external agencies, which are crucial in delivering adequate and appropriate psychosocial support. Although a lot of challenges are faced by many school communities which need to be addressed in order to build resilience, the sooner the schools are able to

provide adequate psychosocial intervention support, the faster they would become resilient and the soonest their students and clients can go back to their normal state of life after certain difficulties.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The proposed psychosocial intervention program for disaster trauma in Albay is valid, relevant, and appropriate for implementation using the module to serve as guide for the guidance practitioners. Since the target beneficiaries of the results of this study are the educational institutions of Albay province, it is suggested for schools to implement the proposed psychosocial intervention program through integration in the present counseling programs with the supervision of the proponent and in collaboration with the external agencies as linkages for continuity and sustainability of the program. The program may be replicated in different secondary schools to improve the school counseling services. The designed module for the program is recommended for the utilization of guidance practitioners as session guide in the implementation of the program. Hence, the school-based psychosocial intervention program is recommended to be integrated in the school guidance program to assist and capacitate the guidance practitioners in response to disaster and any critical incidents, thus, promote development of disaster resilient schools.

Acknowledgment

The researcher acknowledges the support of the BURDMD for the funding and the support of BUCSSP, the guidance practitioners and the teachers of the pilot school, and the panel of jurors and evaluators.

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