

Child Protection in Public Schools: A Correlational Study of Teachers' Awareness and Responsiveness

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Abstract. This study assessed the level of teachers' awareness of the Child Protection Policy (CPP) and their responsiveness in implementing its provisions in public secondary schools in Sibulan, Negros Oriental. A descriptive-correlational design was employed, with 147 teachers and 1,470 students selected through simple random sampling. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Spearman's rank-order correlation, and the Mann-Whitney U test. Results showed that 71.43% of teachers had encountered at least one child protection case in the past five years, with bullying being the most prevalent issue (177 reported cases). Teachers demonstrated very high CPP awareness (mean score = 4.21/5) and self-rated their responsiveness as very high in prevention (mean = 4.64), intervention (4.49), and disciplinary (4.59) domains. Students rated teachers' responsiveness highly (mean scores 4.39-4.51), albeit with slight but significant differences between teacher and student perceptions in some domains. Importantly, teacher CPP awareness was moderately positively associated with student-rated responsiveness (Spearman's $\rho \approx 0.47$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that greater policy knowledge corresponds to stronger child protection practices. However, the findings are limited to the two Sibulan districts studied, one academic year, and self-reported perceptions, which may affect generalizability. Nonetheless, the study provides empirical evidence that strengthening teacher awareness and training in child protection can enhance implementation of the CPP, highlighting the need for ongoing professional development and support systems to ensure a safe learning environment.

Keywords: Advocacy programs; Child protection issues; Child protection policy; Disciplinary measures; Teachers' responsiveness.

1.0 Introduction

No child should be afraid to attend school. However, globally, millions of children encounter violence, abuse, or bullying in the very institutions designed to educate and protect them. UNICEF and UNESCO (2020) reported that one in three students aged 13 to 15 experiences bullying, highlighting that schools worldwide are struggling to provide safe learning environments. Such conditions undermine children's fundamental rights, compromise their academic success, and adversely affect their mental and emotional well-being (United Nations Statistics Division, 2022). International studies consistently identify significant challenges in teacher preparedness to manage child protection issues, often pointing to gaps in training, limited awareness, and insufficient practical guidance for educators (Cossar et al., 2016). Ensuring a safe educational environment aligns directly with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which emphasizes quality education, and SDG 16, which focuses on building peaceful and strong institutions (United Nations Statistics Division, 2022).

Protecting children in schools in the Philippines has become a crucial national priority. The Department of Education (DepEd) established the Child Protection Policy (CPP) through DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, aiming to safeguard students from bullying, abuse, and violence within school premises. Despite this comprehensive policy, these challenges persist, particularly in provincial regions such as Negros Oriental. Local studies indicate a significant gap in teachers' awareness of the policy and schools' responsiveness, especially in rural areas with limited resources (Hernandez et al., 2023; Roche et al., 2023). These localized challenges emphasize the need for context-specific research to understand better and address these barriers effectively. Although considerable research has explored child protection policies nationwide, studies rarely focus on the awareness and responsiveness of teachers and school personnel, including students, in rural communities. Existing research frequently emphasizes urban settings or general policy implementation, leaving rural contexts like Negros Oriental underrepresented (Adewale & Potokri, 2023; Asio et al., 2020). Internationally, similar limitations have been noted, where research often neglects rural educational settings, which typically face distinct challenges due to geographic isolation, resource limitations, and unique community dynamics.

This study aimed to bridge this gap by exploring how advocacy programs influence teachers' awareness and schools' responsiveness to child protection issues in rural public schools. Unlike previous studies that often overlook local nuances, this research uniquely examined the practical, day-to-day experiences and perspectives of stakeholders directly involved in maintaining safe school environments. In doing so, this study contributes to local policy development. It provides a globally relevant insight into practical strategies for implementing child protection policies in rural and resource-constrained educational contexts.

Teachers' awareness and responsiveness are essential for the success of child protection initiatives. Awareness refers to educators' knowledge and understanding of the CPP's provisions – for example, recognizing what constitutes abuse or bullying and knowing when and how to act. Responsiveness refers to the degree to which teachers follow the policy, such as intervening in bullying incidents, reporting them, and implementing preventive programs. Theoretical perspectives support the importance of this connection: having a policy alone is not enough – the outcomes depend on the attitudes and behaviors of those responsible for enforcing it (Endsley, 1995; Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 1986). *Situational Awareness Theory* (Endsley, 1995) conceptualizes awareness as perceiving elements in the environment, comprehending their meaning, and projecting future states. In a school context, this implies that teachers and students must first detect cues of potential abuse or safety concerns (level 1 perception), understand their implications (level 2 comprehension), and anticipate needed protective actions (level 3 projection) if they are to respond effectively. *Social Cognitive Theory* (Bandura, 1986) highlights that behavior emerges from a triadic interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences; accordingly, teachers' and students' responsiveness to the CPP will be shaped by their self-efficacy and beliefs as well as by observed models and social norms within the school. The *Theory of Planned Behavior* (Ajzen, 1991) links these factors to intentional action, proposing that individuals form intentions to enact a policy based on their attitudes, perceived social expectations (subjective norms), and perceived control over the behavior. Together, these theories offer a cohesive lens: situational awareness explains how cognitive vigilance and interpretation of child-safety risks establish awareness, social-cognitive mechanisms account for how observational learning and confidence foster engagement in protective practices, and planned-behavior constructs bridge attitudes and norms to the likelihood of compliance. This integrated framework thus strengthens the study's rationale by clarifying that effective CPP implementation depends on aligned cognitive perception, social learning, and motivational forces guiding both teachers' and students' awareness and responsiveness.

However, awareness is only the starting point. The more pressing question is whether high awareness leads to responsive, concrete actions. Some studies have begun to examine teachers' engagement with child protection policies. For example, a study in Bulacan found that teachers' CPP awareness correlated with their reported responsiveness at school (Asio et al., 2020). Other work suggests further challenges. One case study (Project SHIELDS, Palco, 2025) reported that intensive training enabled teacher advocates to develop school-specific CPPs and educational materials for students and parents, implying positive engagement but also pointing to gaps in general implementation. Notably, few studies have included students' perspectives. Castillo (2023) noted that students' perceptions of CPP enforcement can differ from official school or government reports, indicating that student feedback is a valuable but often missing component. In line with this, Cossar, Brandon, and Jordan (2016) emphasize that children's voices and trust are central to any child protection system: children who feel heard are more likely to report issues, and their input can reveal problems adults overlook. The importance of a timely and

appropriate school response was underscored by a 2025 Philippine Supreme Court ruling, which held a private school legally liable for negligence in a bullying case. The decision affirmed that a school's failure to act on student complaints constitutes a breach of legal and moral duties, reinforcing that educational institutions are accountable for enforcing anti-bullying and child protection policies, regardless of where or when incidents occur (Supreme Court of the Philippines, 2025).

With this background and context, this study aimed to determine public secondary school teachers' awareness of and responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy (CPP) in Sibulan, Negros Oriental. Unlike previous research primarily evaluating policy at face value, this study emphasized assessing practical teacher training, knowledge transfer, and the efficiency of school-level implementation. Specifically, it aimed to (1) identify the prevalence of various child protection incidents encountered by teachers; (2) assess teachers' level of awareness of the CPP and related advocacy programs; (3) examine teachers' responsiveness to child protection protocols, both self-reported by teachers and observed by students, in terms of prevention, intervention, and disciplinary measures; (4) investigate whether a relationship exists between teachers' awareness and their responsiveness; and (5) compare perceptions of CPP implementation between teachers and students. By integrating feedback from both groups, this study provided a more detailed and balanced policy implementation assessment, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Ultimately, the findings aim to support educators, policymakers, and school administrators in strengthening child protection measures, ensuring that the written policies effectively translate into a secure and inclusive educational environment for students.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to assess teachers' awareness and responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy (CPP) and to explore the relationship between these variables. This design was appropriate for capturing natural variations in teachers' knowledge and practices and students' observations without manipulating conditions or inferring causation. Descriptive methods summarized the current awareness and responsive behavior levels, while correlational analysis tested whether greater awareness was associated with higher responsiveness. No experimental treatments were applied; the study relied on survey data reflecting real-world educational contexts. This approach aligns with established methodologies in CPP research and supports the study's objective of identifying patterns and associations that can inform future policy advocacy and program development. Thus, while this approach identifies significant associations, its correlational nature inherently limits any claims of causality.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted exclusively in public secondary schools in the Municipality of Sibulan, Negros Oriental, which was purposively selected based on its high incidence of reported child protection cases. While elementary and secondary schools operate in the municipality, the research focused on the secondary level, where students possess greater cognitive maturity to assess teacher behaviors—during the 2023–2024 academic year, schools in Sibulan had fully resumed on-site instruction following pandemic disruptions, delivering the standard Department of Education (DepEd) curriculum through traditional classroom teaching supplemented by child protection seminars and homeroom guidance sessions under ongoing advocacy initiatives. Typical class sizes ranged from 30 to 50 students per section. Initially, three municipalities—Sibulan, Santa Catalina, and Bindoy—were shortlisted based on Division records identifying the highest reported bullying cases; Sibulan was ultimately chosen for its leading number of incidents, accessibility, and alignment with the study's objectives.

All participating schools maintained functional Child Protection Committees (CPCs) and implemented DepEd-mandated protocols addressing bullying, abuse, and related concerns. Situated in rural and suburban contexts, Sibulan's schools also fostered strong partnerships with parents and community stakeholders, reinforcing the collaborative nature of child protection initiatives. The municipality's documented challenges in managing child protection issues provided a relevant and compelling backdrop for assessing awareness and responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy.

2.3 Research Participants

The study involved public high school teachers and students from Sibulan, Negros Oriental. All secondary schools in Sibulan 1 and Sibulan 2 districts with active CPP advocacy programs and documented child protection cases

were included. All teachers handling classes were invited to participate. At the same time, student respondents were randomly selected from their classes, maintaining an approximate 1:10 teacher-to-student ratio to allow for cross-validation of teacher self-reports. Simple random sampling ensured proportional representation across schools. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from teachers and parental consent, and student assent was secured for minors. The final sample included teachers with varied genders, years of experience, and subject areas, alongside students from Grades 7 to 12, ensuring demographic diversity. Sampling was guided by DepEd records to focus on schools with notable CPP case histories, achieving a representative yet unbiased participant group suitable for correlational analysis.

2.4 Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool was a structured survey questionnaire, developed exclusively for this study, with separate forms for teachers and students. Survey items were drawn directly from official DepEd issuances, particularly DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012 (Child Protection Policy) and DepEd Order No. 55, s. 2013 (Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Anti-Bullying Act), ensuring alignment with established standards and protocols. The teacher questionnaire comprised three sections: (1) demographic profile and prior reporting experience, (2) awareness of CPP provisions and advocacy programs, and (3) self-reported responsive practices, organized into prevention, intervention, and disciplinary domains. The student questionnaire assessed perceptions of their teachers' protective practices in the exact domains, with several items mirroring those in the teacher instrument to allow for cross-validation. Both teachers and students rated their responses using Likert scales measuring frequency and awareness levels.

Before complete data collection, a pilot test was conducted to evaluate clarity and reliability, resulting in minor revisions for improved wording. Cronbach's alpha coefficients demonstrated strong reliability: teacher scales ranged from 0.819 to 0.950, while student scales ranged from 0.703 to 0.778, meeting or exceeding acceptable social science research standards. Content validity was further ensured through expert review by a legal officer and the Division Child Protection Policy coordinator, who affirmed that the instrument comprehensively addressed the constructs of awareness and responsiveness. The final questionnaires were deemed dependable for measuring the study variables based on these reliability and validity assessments. Nevertheless, since data collection relied on self-report questionnaires from teachers and students, the findings may be influenced by respondent biases (e.g., social desirability), and this reliance on subjective data is acknowledged as a methodological limitation.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

After obtaining permission from the Department of Education division office and the school administrators, the researcher worked with each participating school to schedule the survey sessions. An orientation session with administrators and teachers was held in advance to explain the study's purpose and procedures (all administrators attended). Data collection occurred over two weeks in February 2025. Teachers completed the paper questionnaire together in a function room or during faculty meetings, as scheduled by each school. They were instructed not to discuss their answers and to seal their completed surveys in envelopes to preserve anonymity. Students filled out their questionnaires in their classrooms, but their teachers were absent during administration to minimize influence. An impartial staff member (such as a guidance counselor or administrative officer) introduced the survey and supervised its completion. Students were assured that their responses were anonymous and would not affect their grades or standing. They were seated apart from each other to ensure privacy, and 15–20 minutes were provided to complete all items.

2.6 Data Analysis Procedure

All completed questionnaires were reviewed for completeness and coded into a spreadsheet for analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were applied. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) summarize levels of awareness and responsiveness. Teachers' CPP awareness was calculated as a grand mean score and interpreted using an adjectival scale: 1.00–1.80 (Very Low), 1.81–2.60 (Low), 2.61–3.40 (Moderate), 3.41–4.20 (High), and 4.21–5.00 (Very High). The same scale was applied to responsiveness scores for both teachers and students. The number of teachers who had reported handling at least one case was tallied to determine the incidence of child protection cases.

Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to test the relationship between teachers' awareness scores (treated as continuous) and responsiveness scores in each domain (Prevention, Intervention, and Disciplinary) to examine

associations. Spearman’s ρ was chosen due to the data’s ordinal nature and non-normal distribution. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed) was applied to all hypothesis tests. To compare teachers’ and students’ perceptions of teacher responsiveness, the Mann-Whitney U test was used for each domain. This nonparametric test assessed differences in the distribution of teacher versus student ratings, accounting for the ordinal level of data and potential skewness (as responses tended toward high ratings). Mean ranks were compared, with p-values < 0.05 indicating statistically significant differences.

Finally, results were presented in tables aligned with the corresponding research questions, supplemented by narrative explanations. Findings were interpreted in the context of relevant literature to assess alignment with or divergence from previous studies. Conclusions and recommendations were drawn directly from the data, highlighting practical implications for schools in Sibulan and broader applications within the Philippine educational context. In light of these methodological constraints, future research on child protection in schools is advised to incorporate more objective behavioral measures and employ longitudinal or experimental designs, which would help strengthen causal inferences and mitigate the biases inherent in self-report correlational studies.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical standards for studies involving teachers and minors. Prior approval was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent of Negros Oriental and the principals of each participating school. Parental consent was secured for all student participants, and written or verbal assent was obtained from students. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents were assured of anonymity. The survey instruments did not require names or personal identifiers. Teachers were explicitly informed that the study was not an evaluation of their performance but an academic inquiry to support child protection policy implementation. Students were advised that honest responses – whether positive or critical – would not result in penalties.

Participants’ rights and welfare were prioritized throughout data collection. Students could skip questions or withdraw at any time. Although care was taken to minimize sensitive content, given the topics of bullying and abuse, a guidance counselor was available during survey administration for any participant requiring support. No incidents of harm or distress were reported. Completed surveys were securely stored, and only aggregated data were analyzed and reported. Neither individual schools nor respondents were identified in the dissemination of findings. The study ensured confidentiality, minimized risk, and upheld participants’ autonomy throughout the research process.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Frequency of Reported Cases

Table 1 presents the frequency of child protection-related cases reported by teachers in the Municipality of Sibulan over the past five years. Of 147 teacher respondents, 105 (71.43%) claimed to have encountered at least one case, affirming that child protection remains a significant and persistent concern within schools.

Table 1. <i>Frequency of Reported Child Protection Cases in the Municipality of Sibulan over the Past Five Years (n = 147)</i>	
Cases	frequency
Cases Reported if Yes:	105 (71.43%)
1. Bullying or Peer Abuse	177
2. Child Abuse	13
3. Discrimination Against Children	3
4. Child Exploitation	3
5. Violence Against Children Committed in Schools	2

Bullying or peer abuse was the most frequently reported issue, with 177 cases, highlighting its prevalence as the dominant challenge in the school environment. This finding is consistent with national reports identifying bullying as a primary child protection concern in Philippine schools (Ombay, 2025). On the other hand, other severe cases were reported much less frequently: child abuse (13 cases), discrimination against children (3 cases), child exploitation (3 cases), and violence against children committed within schools (2 cases). The substantial frequency of bullying incidents stresses that schools must continuously reinforce preventive measures and interventions. Conversely, the notably fewer reported cases of abuse, exploitation, and discrimination raise important questions about awareness, recognition, and willingness to report such incidents, suggesting potential underreporting or less visibility of these cases within the school context. These results indicate the critical need

for ongoing awareness, training, and reinforcement of child protection protocols, especially targeting bullying prevention, while also addressing possible gaps in recognizing and reporting other serious child protection issues.

The dominance of bullying in reported cases emphasizes the continued need for targeted anti-bullying programs, in line with Republic Act 10627 (Anti-Bullying Act of 2013) and the CPP's emphasis on preventive strategies. Schools should sustain and expand efforts to educate students and teachers on bullying prevention and intervention. However, it is also possible that the apparent prevalence of bullying relative to other forms of child protection violations reflects limitations in schools' capacity to detect and address more complex cases such as emotional abuse, exploitation, or neglect. In contexts like Sibulan, where only two accredited guidance counselors serve across two districts, the scarcity of trained child protection professionals may hinder the identification, reporting, and proper management of more sensitive or less visible forms of abuse. This highlights the urgent need to strengthen school-based support systems and improve access to professional psychosocial services to ensure that all child protection concerns are adequately recognized and addressed. Ensuring that all child protection incidents are properly documented and managed by the designated bodies, such as the CPC, contributes to student safety and well-being and improves data reliability and institutional accountability. In summary, the table reflects a generally strong level of teacher responsiveness to child protection concerns but also affirms that bullying remains a persistent issue that demands consistent, systematized action and precise policy adherence across all schools.

3.2 Teachers' Awareness of the Child Protection Policy

Table 2 presents teachers' self-reported awareness regarding various provisions of the CPP and related advocacy programs. The overall composite mean of 4.21 corresponds to a verbal description of "Very Aware" and reflects a Very High level of awareness among teachers. This implies that the CPP and its accompanying protocols are present in schools and well understood by teaching staff. Every item listed scored a mean above 3.88, placing all responses within the "High" or "Very High" awareness categories. Such consistency demonstrates that most teachers are not only familiar with the legal basis of CPP, particularly DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012, but are also highly aware of their responsibilities, the existence of child protection committees, protocols for disciplinary action, and structures that support safe school environments.

While teachers' self-reported awareness of the CPP is very high, the continued dominance of bullying cases suggests that knowledge alone does not entirely prevent peer-to-peer aggression. This underscores the *Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)*, which posits that strong awareness and upbeat attitudes must be coupled with adequate perceived control and supportive norms to achieve actual behavioral change (e.g., effective bullying prevention). Bullying behaviors are complex social phenomena influenced by student dynamics, school culture, and external community factors. High teacher awareness enables better detection, reporting, and intervention, but systemic factors, such as limited psychosocial support personnel, exemplified by the presence of only two guidance counselors in Sibulan, may hinder the eradication of bullying incidents. Thus, while strong teacher awareness is a critical foundation, it must be complemented by sustained school-wide interventions, student empowerment, and robust support systems to realize the CPP's objectives fully.

However, this notably high level of teacher awareness contrasts with previous local studies, which indicated significant gaps in teachers' knowledge of CPP provisions, particularly in rural areas with limited resources (Hernandez et al., 2023; Roche et al., 2023). This discrepancy underscores the critical importance of context-specific assessments. In the Municipality of Sibulan, the current high awareness levels observed may reflect successful and ongoing advocacy initiatives and professional development training conducted by schools and the DepEd. This outcome exemplifies *Social Cognitive Theory* in action, wherein a supportive, well-trained school environment (through modeling, advocacy, and reinforcement) cultivates high collective awareness.

Among the highest-rated items are those about structural policies and procedural clarity. Teachers reported strong awareness of having an organized Child Protection Committee (mean = 4.36), a clear school policy on non-violent discipline (4.35), and awareness of the DepEd Order itself (4.33–4.37). Awareness is also very high regarding codes of conduct for students (4.27) and teachers (4.29), as well as the orientation of policies during school openings (4.29–4.30). These scores suggest that schools perform well in formalizing CPP structures and that teachers are consistently exposed to these elements during orientations, seminars, or faculty briefings. These findings echo

Rabina and Writes (2019), who found that teachers in Dumaguete City were “Very Aware” of the CPP framework and related responsibilities.

Table 2. Level of Teachers’ Perceived Awareness of the Child Protection Policy Based on the Existing Advocacy Programs (n=147)

I am aware of the following to a CERTAIN EXTENT:		x̄	VD	LoA
1.	On the issuance of the <i>DepEd Order No. 40, s. 2012</i> entitled “DepEd Child Protection Policy”.	4.33	VA	VH
2.	On the implementation of the DepEd Order on protecting children in schools from abuse, violence, exploitation, discrimination, bullying, and other forms of abuse.	4.37	VA	VH
3.	On the implementation of the written school-based child protection and/or anti-bullying policies.	4.24	VA	VH
4.	On the incorporation of the code of conduct in the school-based child protection or anti-bullying policy for the following groups:			
a.	Students	4.27	VA	VH
b.	School Administrators	4.20	A	H
c.	Non-Teaching Personnel	4.13	A	H
d.	Teachers	4.29	VA	VH
e.	Visitors (Parents, alumni, etc.)	3.97	A	H
f.	Off-campus activities such as field trip, camping, etc.	3.88	A	H
5.	Specific provisions to address potential risks to students such as:			
a.	Disregarding abusive situations or behavior against children;	4.09	A	H
b.	Employing children as house helpers or assigning students to care for a teacher’s child while in school;	4.06	A	H
c.	Relating with children in private for personal matters like being as “text mates” or Facebook friends;	4.05	A	H
d.	Going out with students after school such as watching movies;	4.14	A	H
e.	Using green jokes or jokes with double meaning in the class; &	4.12	A	H
f.	Cultural beliefs, such as child marriage being acceptable based on one’s culture or religion, and amicable settlements of child abuse cases.	4.07	A	H
6.	The promotion or information dissemination of the school-based child protection and/or anti-bullying policies that is done during school opening.	4.29	VA	VH
7.	The written procedures to guide in conducting disciplinary proceedings in cases of offenses committed by pupils, students, or learners.	4.16	A	H
8.	The promotion or information dissemination of the school-based child protection and/or anti-bullying policies that is done during school opening.	4.30	VA	VH
9.	The written procedures to guide in conducting disciplinary proceedings in cases of offenses committed by pupils, students, or learners.	4.20	A	H
10.	The school has adopted a conflict resolution mechanism that respects the rights of indigenous people, provided that they conform to the child’s rights and the department issuances on child protection.	4.04	A	H
11.	There is an established system for identifying students who may be suffering from significant harm based on physical, emotional, or behavioral signs.	4.09	A	H
12.	The school has developed and implemented a school-based referral and monitoring system to address child abuse and bullying cases.	4.27	VA	VH
13.	The school has submitted its consolidated reports on bullying and child abuse cases to the Division Office a week after the opening of each school year.	4.18	A	H
14.	The school has a clear policy on the use of positive and non-violent discipline for children.	4.35	VA	VH
15.	The school has an organized Child Protection Committee (CPC) in the school.	4.36	VA	VH
16.	There are annual capacity-building activities for the members of CPC.	4.02	A	H
17.	There is a feedback mechanism in the school to monitor the implementation of the Child Protection and/or Anti-Bullying policies.	4.10	A	H
Composite		4.21	VA	VH

Note: Verbal Description (VD); Level of Awareness (LoA); 4.21–5.00, Very Aware (VA), Very High (VH); 3.41– 4.20 Aware (A), High (H); 2.61–3.40 Moderate Aware (MA), Moderate (M); 1.81–2.60 Slightly Aware (SA), Low (L); 1.00–1.80 Unaware (U) Very Low (VL)

Meanwhile, the items with relatively lower means, though still within the "High Awareness" range, offer important insights. Awareness of off-campus activity guidelines (mean = 3.88) and more contextual issues, such as cultural practices (4.07), were among the lowest-rated items in Table 2. These topics may receive less emphasis during training or may not be as frequently encountered in day-to-day school life. Table 2 shows slightly lower scores for feedback mechanisms (mean = 4.10) and annual capacity-building for CPCs (4.02). These suggest that teachers may be less informed about the evaluation or sustainability mechanisms, while they know the broader framework. The implication is that not all elements of the CPP, particularly those that happen in the background, such as CPC training schedules or monitoring processes, are equally emphasized in advocacy programs.

Despite these few areas for reinforcement, the overall pattern is remarkably positive. The data show that teachers in Sibulan 1 and Sibulan 2 districts are highly aware of the national policy framework and its localized school implementation. The findings support theoretical models such as the *Situational Awareness Theory* model, which proposes that high levels of awareness are a prerequisite for appropriate behavior, and Bandura’s *Social Cognitive Theory*, which emphasizes the role of knowledge in shaping confidence and action. However, as noted in recent

studies (Bayuca, 2020), awareness alone is insufficient to guarantee effective implementation. Therefore, while DepEd’s advocacy programs have laid a strong foundation, continuous reinforcement and targeted focus on underrepresented areas will be essential in ensuring that high awareness translates into consistent and contextually informed responsiveness.

3.3 Teachers’ Responsiveness to Protection Protocols

Table 3 displays the teachers’ self-assessed responsiveness to the prescribed child protection protocols, categorized into three domains: prevention, intervention, and disciplinary measures. The results reveal uniformly high self-ratings, with all items falling under the “Very High” level of responsiveness, indicating that teachers perceive themselves to be consistently enacting the protective practices outlined in the CPP. The composite mean for Prevention protocols is 4.64, for Intervention protocols is 4.49, and for Disciplinary measures is 4.59—all of which fall under the verbal description “Always.”

Table 3. *Level of Responsiveness of the Teachers to the Protection Protocols as Perceived by the Teachers Themselves (n=147)*

I practice the following protection protocols:		$\bar{x}$	VD	LoR
Prevention				
1.	Implement a no-bullying policy in my classroom to create a safe and inclusive environment for all students.	4.81	A	VH
2.	Identify and address early signs of potential child abuse or neglect among my students.	4.60	A	VH
3.	Participate in school-initiated child protection training programs and apply the knowledge in my teaching practice.	4.56	A	VH
4.	Integrate child protection policies, such as guidelines on preventing harassment and exploitation, into my classroom management.	4.60	A	VH
5.	Encourage and guide students in reporting bullying or abuse, ensuring they fully understand the reporting mechanisms available.	4.63	A	VH
Composite		4.64	A	VH
Intervention				
1.	Report any suspected child abuse or exploitation cases to the designated school authorities for immediate action.	4.47	A	VH
2.	Provide emotional and psychological support to students who are victims of abuse, bullying or harassment through guidance and referrals.	4.37	A	VH
3.	Collaborate with the guidance counselor and school personnel in implementing intervention strategies for students involved in bullying incidents.	4.52	A	VH
4.	Follow established school procedures for managing child protection cases, ensuring timely intervention and support.	4.54	A	VH
5.	Work closely with parents and guardians to intervene effectively in cases where a student’s safety and well-being are at risk.	4.54	A	VH
Composite		4.49	A	VH
Disciplinary Measures				
1.	Enforce appropriate disciplinary actions for bullying incidents, ensuring they align with child protection guidelines.	4.56	A	VH
2.	Consistently apply disciplinary measures that adhere to the DepEd Child Protection Policy and uphold the rights of every student.	4.53	A	VH
3.	Collaborate with school administrators to ensure fair and consistent disciplinary actions for child protection violations.	4.62	A	VH
4.	Actively involve parents or guardians when addressing serious misconduct related to child protection issues.	4.57	A	VH
5.	Implement positive and non-violent discipline of children that emphasize behavior correction and rehabilitation, rather than punishment alone.	4.67	A	VH
Composite		4.59	A	VH

Note: Verbal Description (VD); Level of Responsiveness (LoR); 4.21–5.00, Always (A), Very High (VH); 3.41– 4.20 Frequent (F), High (H); 2.61–3.40; Sometimes (S), Moderate (M); 1.81–2.60 Rare (R), Low (L); 1.00–1.80 Never (N) Very Low (VL)

The results suggest a strong sense of regularity and habitual responsiveness among teachers, reinforcing that child protection protocols are understood and embedded in daily school practices. This uniformly high self-assessment correlates with perceived efficacy and sustained behavior. In the present study, Spearman’s rank-order correlation further confirmed this association, yielding $\rho \approx 0.47$ ($p < .001$) – a moderate positive effect size between teachers’ awareness and their responsive practices.

Among the prevention items, the highest score (4.81) is observed in teachers’ implementation of a classroom no-bullying policy, indicating that this particular practice is nearly universal and perhaps most emphasized in training and advocacy efforts. Likewise, items related to identifying early signs of abuse (4.60), integrating CPP into classroom management (4.60), and encouraging students to report (4.63) also garnered Very High means,

reflecting proactive attitudes. The lowest in this set—participation in training (4.56)—remains within the Very High bracket, but may suggest logistical barriers to continuous training access, rather than lack of willingness.

The composite mean of 4.49 in the intervention category remains commendable, though slightly lower than prevention. Teachers rate themselves highly for collaborating with school personnel (4.52), following procedures (4.54), and involving parents (4.54), suggesting a collaborative approach in responding to incidents. The relatively lowest score in this group, providing emotional and psychological support (4.37), while still high, could indicate a perceived limitation in capacity or confidence among teachers to handle complex emotional needs, potentially deferring that role to guidance counselors.

Disciplinary practices are also rated as Very High, with teachers strongly agreeing that they enforce appropriate discipline (4.56), collaborate with administrators (4.62), and promote non-violent and restorative approaches (4.67)—the highest across the domain. These results align closely with the DepEd Child Protection Policy, which discourages punitive approaches in favor of rehabilitation, fairness, and child rights. The emphasis on positive discipline echoes current best practices in child protection and may also be attributed to sustained awareness campaigns under RA 10627 (Anti-Bullying Act) and CPP guidelines.

A notable implication drawn from Table 3 is the consistency across domains. All areas—preventive, responsive, and corrective—are integrated into the routine behavior of teachers. The relatively small difference between the highest and lowest item (from 4.37 to 4.81) suggests minimal variation in practice, which may either reflect a genuinely high level of institutionalization of the protocols or a possible positive self-assessment bias. Nevertheless, the absence of low or moderate ratings affirms that teachers are active protectors in the school environment. From a theoretical lens, this supports constructs in Bandura's *Social Cognitive Theory* and the *Situational Awareness Theory* framework, where heightened awareness correlates with perceived efficacy and sustained behavior. These findings are consistent with Alombro et al. (2022), who noted that informed teachers are more confident and engaged in policy implementation, aligning with the *Social Cognitive Theory* model that links greater awareness to more initiative-taking protective behavior.

Therefore, Table 3 affirms that teachers in the municipality of Sibulan do not merely know the policy—they act on it. Their high responsiveness across the board implies that advocacy efforts have taken root in institutional policies and daily practice. These results validate the assumption that teacher awareness is a powerful enabler of responsive action, and they reinforce the importance of continued advocacy efforts to preserve and strengthen this behavior.

3.4 Students' Perception of the Level of Responsiveness of the Teachers to Protection Protocols

Table 4 examines whether students perceive these protective actions from their teachers, offering an external validation to this promising self-assessment. It presents students' perceptions of teacher responsiveness to child protection protocols, specifically prevention, intervention, and disciplinary measures. The data reveal that students rate teacher responsiveness as consistently Very High, with composite means of 4.39 for prevention, 4.48 for intervention, and 4.51 for disciplinary measures. These values, interpreted as "Always", affirm that students recognize and experience their teachers' commitment to child protection practices within their school environment. The high scores suggest that the protective strategies teachers claim to implement (as shown in Table 3) are largely visible and felt by the students, validating the strength of policy translation from intention to lived experience.

Within the prevention domain, students most strongly agreed that teachers set clear classroom rules to prevent harassment and bullying (mean = 4.58), followed by teachers' participation in protection training (4.51) and their proactive behavior in noticing early signs of abuse (4.40). While these reflect solid affirmation of visible and preventive measures, the lowest mean (4.21) emerged from the item about students' comfort in reporting bullying or abuse. Although still in the "Very High" range, this result hints at a subtle barrier. While structures exist, not all students may feel equally empowered to report concerns. This area merits further attention, as it touches the core of protection, accessibility, and trust in systems.

In terms of intervention, all items received high agreement, with the highest being the involvement of parents or guardians when student safety is at risk (4.59). Students also confirmed that teachers offer support to bullied or

abused peers (4.57) and that the school has clear protocols for intervention (4.44). The lowest item (4.37), regarding teacher reporting to the proper authorities, though still very high, may imply that students do not always witness the reporting process or are unaware of behind-the-scenes protocols, thus slightly underreporting perceived teacher action.

Table 4. *Level of Responsiveness of the Teachers to the Protection Protocols as perceived by the Students (n=1470)*

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	VD	LoR
Prevention			
1. My school makes sure that bullying is not allowed and keeps students safe.	4.24	A	VH
2. I know that teachers try to notice early signs of abuse or problems with students early.	4.40	A	VH
3. I know teachers go through special training to learn how to protect students from abuse & bullying.	4.51	A	VH
4. I know that my teachers manage their classrooms by making rules to stop harassment and bullying.	4.58	A	VH
5. I feel comfortable reporting bullying or abuse because I know the school has a way to help.	4.21	A	VH
Composite	4.39	A	VH
Intervention			
1. My teachers report cases of abuse or bullying to the right school staff.	4.37	A	VH
2. I know that teachers help students who are bullied or abused by offering support and guidance.	4.57	A	VH
3. I know that teachers work with school counselors & staff to help students involved in bullying incidents.	4.45	A	VH
4. I understand that there are clear steps the school follows quickly to deal with child protection cases.	4.44	A	VH
5. My school involves parents or guardians when a student's safety is at risk.	4.59	A	VH
Composite	4.48	A	VH
Disciplinary Measures			
1. My teachers make sure that discipline students involved in bullying fairly and based on school rules.	4.59	A	VH
2. My school respects our rights by following the child protection rules when disciplining students.	4.52	A	VH
3. My school leaders make sure that punishments are fair and consistent when students break child protection rules.	4.38	A	VH
4. My school talks to parents or guardians when a student does something serious, like bullying.	4.51	A	VH
5. My school focuses on positive ways to help students learn from mistakes instead of just punishing them.	4.54	A	VH
Composite	4.51	A	VH

Note: Verbal Description (VD); Level of Responsiveness (LoR); 4.21–5.00, Always (A), Very High (VH); 3.41–4.20 Frequent (F), High (H); 2.61–3.40: Sometimes (S), Moderate (M); 1.81–2.60 Rare (R), Low (L); 1.00–1.80 Never (N) Very Low (VL)

As for disciplinary measures, students consistently rated their teachers as fair and constructive. The highest score (4.59) was for discipline being implemented fairly and based on rules, closely followed by the promotion of positive discipline approaches (4.54) and respect for children's rights (4.52). Interestingly, while still strong, the lowest score (4.38) concerned consistency in how school leaders ensure fair punishments. This finding may reflect occasional variability in administrative enforcement or a perceived lack of transparency in the disciplinary process. Nevertheless, the uniform "Very High" range across all items strongly indicates student satisfaction with how discipline is handled in alignment with the CPP.

Despite these uniformly Very High ratings from teachers and students, minor yet meaningful discrepancies were noted between their perspectives. In particular, teachers' self-ratings in the *prevention* and *disciplinary* domains were slightly higher than students' ratings, and this difference was statistically significant (*Mann-Whitney U*, $p < .05$). Notably, no significant gap was found in the *intervention* domain. All mean scores remained in the "Very High" category, indicating that perceptions are broadly aligned on the strength of protective practices. However, the *minor perceptual gaps* suggest that teachers may hold a somewhat more optimistic view of their child protection actions than their students, a common outcome likely influenced by differences in perspective. Such nuances highlight the importance of continuous reflection and communication, ensuring that high awareness and knowledge translate into effective and consistently recognized protective behaviors among all stakeholders.

The data in Table 4 corroborate the findings from Table 3. While teachers rated themselves slightly higher across domains, student perceptions are closely aligned, especially in the intervention domain, where differences were statistically insignificant. This reinforces the theoretical assertion that awareness leads to behavior, and that behavior becomes validated through stakeholder feedback. The slight differences, particularly in prevention and discipline, stress the necessity of reinforcing transparency, consistency, and a school culture that empowers students to speak up. Ultimately, the alignment between the perspectives of teachers and students illustrates a school system where child protection policies are not just administrative requirements but are active, living frameworks safeguarding student well-being.

3.5 Correlation between Awareness and Responsiveness

Table 5 illustrates the correlation between stakeholders' perceived awareness of the Child Protection Policy (CPP) and their responsiveness to implementing its protection protocols, using Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation. The results show a moderate positive correlation between awareness and responsiveness in all three domains: Prevention ($r_s = 0.470$, $p < .001$), Intervention ($r_s = 0.470$, $p < .001$), and Disciplinary Measures ($r_s = 0.458$, $p < .001$). All three relationships are statistically significant at the 0.05 level, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{01}) in each case. This confirms that increased awareness of the CPP is associated with higher responsiveness to child protection protocols among the respondents.

Table 5. Relationship between Teachers' Awareness of the CPP and Their Level of Responsiveness to Protection Protocols

Awareness and Level of Responsiveness in Terms of:	r_s	p	Decision	Remark
Prevention	0.470	<0.001	Reject H_{01}	Significant
Intervention	0.470	<0.001	Reject H_{01}	Significant
Disciplinary Measures	0.458	<0.001	Reject H_{01}	Significant

Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation (r_s) at 0.05 Level of Significance

These results affirm one of the study's key assertions: knowledge fosters action. Teachers who possess a clear understanding of the CPP, its legal foundations, reporting guidelines, and child-centered procedures are significantly more likely to act responsively when child protection concerns arise. The findings provide empirical support to frameworks such as the *Theory of Planned Behavior* and *Situational Awareness Theory*, which posit that informed attitudes and self-efficacy enhance consistent behavior. The implication is that awareness is not just an administrative requirement but a behavioral catalyst. This aligns with prior research findings. Asio et al. (2020) and Alombro et al. (2022), for instance, have similarly observed that teacher awareness significantly influences the quality and consistency of child protection implementation. In contexts where teachers actively engage in advocacy programs, seminars, and school policy orientations, their responsiveness tends to be higher and more aligned with institutional protocols. This validates the ongoing investment in awareness campaigns, particularly those embedded in DepEd Orders No. 40 and 55, which highlight the role of professional development in translating policy into daily action.

The moderate strength of the correlation also carries a practical message. While awareness is a crucial factor, it is not the only determinant of responsiveness. Other influences, such as school leadership, culture of support, clarity of internal protocols, or even workload, may mediate or moderate how awareness translates into action. Nonetheless, given its accessibility and modifiability, enhancing awareness remains one of the most actionable strategies for strengthening school child protection systems. In essence, Table 5 validates the heart of this study's conceptual framework: the path to a responsive and protective school environment begins with informed educators. Schools that invest in structured and sustained awareness-building among their personnel are more likely to develop vigilance, accountability, and care cultures. Through this lens, the correlation results are not just numbers—they are a call to ensure that child protection knowledge is continuously refreshed, contextually grounded, and institutionally supported.

3.6 Comparison of Teacher and Student Perceptions

Table 6 presents a comparative analysis of teachers' and students' perceptions of how teachers apply protection protocols under the CPP, specifically in Prevention, Intervention, and Disciplinary Measures. The Mann-Whitney U Test was employed to determine whether statistically significant differences exist between the two groups.

Table 6. Difference between the Perceptions of Teachers and Students Regarding How Teachers Apply the Identified Protocols

Protection Protocols	n	Median	U	p	Decision	Remark
Prevention						
Teachers	147	4.80	78157	<0.01	Reject H ₀₂	Significant
Students	1470	4.60				
Intervention						
Teachers	147	4.80	99300	<0.097	Fail to reject H ₀₂	Not Significant
Students	1470	4.60				
Disciplinary Measures						
Teachers	147	5.00	78157	<0.01	Reject H ₀₂	Significant
Students	1470	4.80				

Mann-Whitney U Test at 0.05 Level of Significance

In the Prevention domain, a statistically significant difference was found ($U = 78157$, $p < .001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0). Teachers rated their preventive practices with a median of 4.80, while students gave a slightly lower median of 4.60. Although both medians fall under the “Always” category, the significant result points to a perceptual gap—teachers perceive themselves as more consistently applying preventive strategies (such as anti-bullying rules and early detection of warning signs) than what students observe or experience.

For Intervention, the test yielded a non-significant result ($U = 99300$, $p = 0.097$), suggesting no statistically significant difference in perceptions between teachers and students. Both groups gave similar median scores (Teachers = 4.80, Students = 4.60), leading to the decision not to reject the null hypothesis. This indicates alignment in views. Both parties agree that when incidents of abuse or bullying occur, teachers respond appropriately through actions such as reporting to authorities, providing emotional support, and collaborating with parents or school counselors. This consensus may reflect the visibility and immediacy of intervention efforts, making them equally recognizable to implementers and beneficiaries.

In contrast, the Disciplinary Measures domain reveals another significant difference ($U = 93735$, $p = 0.006$), rejecting the null hypothesis. Teachers rated their adherence to fair and child-friendly discipline with a perfect median of 5.00, while students provided a slightly lower median of 4.80. Although the difference is slight and both medians still fall under “Always,” the significance implies that teachers may perceive their disciplinary actions as more consistent and just than how students experience them. Students might be less aware of the rationale behind certain disciplinary decisions or may have encountered isolated incidents that shaped their perception of inconsistency. Two of the three domains (Prevention and Disciplinary Measures) demonstrate significant differences in perception, whereas both groups mutually affirm Intervention protocols. This suggests that while students largely agree with teachers’ claims regarding intervention efforts, they are slightly more cautious in affirming the consistency and visibility of preventive and disciplinary practices.

These results carry important implications. First, they highlight the necessity of bridging perceptual gaps through improved communication and student engagement, particularly around rules, reporting mechanisms, and the rationale behind disciplinary actions. When students fully understand what actions are being taken and why, they are more likely to perceive fairness and feel protected. Second, the findings support that self-assessment alone is insufficient for evaluating policy implementation—student voice is vital. Incorporating student feedback into CPP monitoring systems can strengthen trust and refine school practices.

Ultimately, Table 5 affirms the overall positive implementation of CPP in schools, with strong convergence in perceptions on key practices. However, it also serves as a reminder that student experience must match perceived excellence. Continuous monitoring, student engagement, and reflective practice will be essential to move from a responsive system to a truly transformative one, where every child feels equally protected, valued, and empowered within the school environment. The findings confirm that teachers in Sibulan 1 and Sibulan 2 districts exhibit high awareness and responsiveness to the Child Protection Policy, with students essentially affirming these efforts. Bullying remains the most common issue, highlighting the need for sustained prevention. A strong link between awareness and responsiveness suggests that informed teachers respond more consistently. While student and teacher perceptions align overall, slight gaps call for continuous feedback to strengthen awareness-building efforts and enhance responsiveness through existing advocacy programs.

4.0 Conclusions

It is evident that teachers are aware of the Child Protection Policy and demonstrate consistent responsiveness in applying its protocols within the school setting. Notably, both teachers’ self-assessments and student feedback indicated Very High levels of awareness and responsiveness, showing a convergence in perceptions of protective practice. Furthermore, a statistically significant positive correlation ($\rho \approx 0.47$, $p < .001$) between teachers’ awareness and responsiveness underscores that greater CPP knowledge translates into more robust child protection actions. This behavior reflects not only their understanding of the policy but also their commitment to student welfare as shaped by the existing advocacy programs provided by the Department of Education. These initiatives have equipped teachers with the knowledge and confidence to act decisively when child protection issues arise. While minor perception gaps between teachers and students were noted (particularly in prevention

and disciplinary domains, where teachers rated themselves slightly higher), both groups affirm that protective practices are present and actively observed. However, these conclusions are drawn from self-reported data and a correlational design; thus, causality cannot be inferred, and some response bias may be present. Building on these findings, the study recommends continued Child Protection Policy training for teachers, hiring additional psychosocial support personnel (e.g., guidance counselors) to assist with bullying and other cases, and integrating student feedback into child protection initiatives to address perceptual gaps. Teachers are vital enablers of a safe and inclusive learning environment because no child should be afraid to attend school.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The author confirms being the sole contributor to this work. She conceptualized the study, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the manuscript. The author has approved the final version of this paper and takes full responsibility for its content.

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