

Supporting mental health needs during COVID-19

Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse (CPTCSA), Philippines

Background

The Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse (CPTCSA) has been working for more than 25 years in the Philippines to provide preventive and therapeutic support to young perpetrators and survivors of child sexual abuse, and to train foster care providers for children who have been sexually abused. CPTCSA is a non-profit, non-government child focused institution working towards a safe world for children free from sexual abuse and exploitation. As part of its strong commitment to evidence-based intervention, CPTCSA has documented its specialist therapeutic support model and trains social workers in its replication.

Its school-based prevention work currently reaches well over 500 schools and ten parishes through a school and faith-based curriculum, and, in a notable advocacy achievement, secured government agreement in 2009 to add a child sexual abuse prevention programme to the national curriculum.

“Due to COVID-19, we thought that we would have to stop operations, but we decided to think outside the box.”

Zeny Rosales
Executive Director, CPTCSA

Mental health in the Philippines COVID-19 context

According to *The State of the World's Children 2021: On my mind: promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*¹ – UNICEF's most comprehensive look at the mental health of children, adolescents and caregivers in the 21st century – even before COVID-19, children and young people carried the burden of mental health conditions without significant investment in addressing them.

A Filipino study showed that youth age and students are among those with significant association to a greater psychological impact due to the pandemic. In addition, UNICEF also reported that children nowadays face a trifecta of threats which include direct consequences of the disease itself, interruption in essential services, and increasing poverty and inequality. All of these can lead to higher incidences of stress, anxiety, and depression. The study, conducted by UNICEF and Gallup in 21 countries in the first half of 2021, shows that 19% of young people reported often feeling depressed or having little interest in doing things.²

The programme

CPTCSA created the Rapha helpline in 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a crisis helpline for all cases and problems, and not limited to sexual abuse. There are three ways in which someone can seek help: via telephone call, text message or email.

¹ Source: UNICEF State of the World's Children 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2021>

² Mental health and well-being of children in the Philippine setting during the COVID-19 pandemic. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8501475/



Family
for every child

**How
we
care**

By practitioners,
for practitioners.



Rapha Helpline

We're here to listen, to help you heal.

Ano ang nasa isip mo?

GLOBE (M-F):
0977-652-0230

VIBER:
Monday : 0961-718-2654
Tuesday & Thursday: 0961-718-2655
Wednesday & Friday: 0961-718-2658
facebook.com/CPTCSA.org

8 AM - 5 PM, Monday-Friday



TRAINED COUNSELORS READY TO HELP

*Have you been or do you
know anyone who has
been:*

- Thinking of negative thoughts;
- Feeling confused or lost
- Withdrawn
- Problem with sleep and/or appetite
- Interpersonal problems

Center for the
Prevention and
Treatment of Child
Sexual Abuse offers
**FREE ONLINE CARE
AND SUPPORT** to those
in need of emotional
assistance and
guidance.

#YOUmatter



“The world doesn't stop during the pandemic. We should innovate ourselves. Use technology.”

Zeny Rosales
Executive Director, CPTCSA

This helpline was created as a free resource, open to anyone needing to talk to someone about their problems and receive support. Callers are affected by conditions including personality issues, disabilities, and depression. Many callers have not attempted to seek mental health support previously, in part because they would not be able to cover psychologist fees. However, through the helpline, CPTCSA makes mental health support more accessible and is able to refer helpline callers to government psychologists when appropriate.

Implementation

The helpline is operated by three social workers, as well as a supervisor. To build on their existing knowledge, these social workers were trained in how to address and provide crisis help. CPTCSA provided each social worker with a telephone, enabling them to operate the helpline from home.

Sixty-eight per cent of initial contacts with the helpline during the first year were made by text message, which in many cases then led to phone calls. Each caller remained anonymous, however, social

workers documented the nature of each call along with basic information, such as the caller's region, an estimate of the caller's gender and age, as well as whether there was a resolution to the call or if further investigation or follow up was needed.

Calls to the helpline can be categorised into a number of key themes, including general inquiries, child sexual abuse, mental health support, domestic violence, childcare issues, marital issues, referrals, legal, medical, crisis and emergency. CPTCSA is continuously improving the documentation of calls and quality of the responses.

The needs expressed across a sample of 72 calls included psychiatric, depression, and anxiety support (19), marital and family issues (eight), child behavioural or other problems (six), sexual abuse (13), personal stress and sadness (six), legal concerns (six), an emergency (one), and general inquiries (13). Mental health needs were paramount amongst callers to the helpline.

CPTCSA is evaluating the need to bring in volunteers to assist the operation of the helpline.

Challenges

- Although providing mental health support was already part of CPTCSA's work, running a helpline was a new initiative. A period of time was spent following the outbreak of COVID-19 exploring how to set up and implement a helpline, which delayed the launch of the project.
- The inability to assess non-verbal communication through the helpline inhibits social workers' ability to fully address and support callers.
- Discussions amongst helpline staff about the types of cases called in, and the responses to the calls, revealed the need for more frequent supportive supervisory sessions for those staff; debriefing and learning was an important component of the work which was not always sufficiently resourced.

Outcomes

- The telephone helpline has provided those with limited access to online services (due to unstable internet connections) with an opportunity to receive accessible mental health support.
- The Rapha helpline is now an integral part of CPTCSA's services. CPTCSA is exploring how to continue operating the helpline beyond the pandemic.
- CPTCSA has reached over 70 people across the country through the helpline.
- The helpline knows no boundaries, and has helped support Filipino people living abroad.

Top tips

- 1** Understand the needs of your context and the communities you work with to determine if there is a need for a helpline or if others already exist.
- 2** Innovate. Don't be scared to try something new. Improvements can be made along the way.
- 3** Take advantage of technology to implement new ideas. Learn from it and adapt it to your work.

CONTACT DETAILS

Find out more about CPTCSA at
<https://www.familyforeverychild.org/center-for-the-prevention-and-treatment-of-child-sexual-abuse>
or contact Zeny Rosales at
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