

BARANGAY-LEVEL MECHANISMS IN COMBATING ONLINE SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN (OSAEC)**Angelika T. Hormachuelos**<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0776-4492>

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ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review, conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) framework, investigates the capacity of the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs) in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur, to combat Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC). A total of 18 studies published between 2015 to 2025 were identified, screened, and analysed. The review highlights six key themes: availability of resources, capacity-building training, inter-agency coordination, cultural barriers, technological readiness, and community reporting mechanisms. The key themes demonstrate how the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPCs) play an important role as a frontline actor in prevention, early detection, referral systems and community awareness. With these points, the study underscores the need for strengthened institutional support, sustained capacity development, culturally responsive strategies, and technology-enabled reporting systems to enhance the effectiveness of barangay-level child protection mechanism against OSAEC. The findings offer evidence-based insights that can inform policy reforms, guide program design, and support future research on community-based child protection systems.

Keywords:

Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC), Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC), Local Child Protection, Systematic Review, Referral Systems, PRISMA

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of internet around the world has become part of everyday life for both adults and children. Kid's used social media, online games, and learning platforms to study, play, and talk with friends. While these bring opportunities, they also create dangers like Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC). This problem is not only happening in one country but all over the world. Because the internet is open and fast, many cases of children being exploited online go unnoticed. International groups, governments, and communities are now working hard to stop this, but the challenge remains huge because technology changes quickly.

Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children is very serious issue. In fact, the Philippines is often called one of the hotspots of online sexual exploitation of children. Many cases are reported every year, and sometimes the victims are very young. Because of this, the national government has made laws and programs to protect children and to punish offenders. In Article XV, sec 3(2), of the 1987 Constitution, it was stated that the state shall defend the right of the children to assistance including proper care and nutrition, and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation and other conditions prejudicial to their development. These include partnerships with international organizations, stricter monitoring, and support services for victims. But even with these national efforts, the fight against OSAEC is not only the responsibility of the government, it is also the responsibility to every community, especially the barangays (Consortium, 2023).

According to the Article 87 of the Children & Youth Welfare Code (PD 603) the Barangay Council's for the Protection of Children (BCPC) is first line of defence in protecting children because it works closest with families and neighbours. They are tasked to watch over children, raise awareness in the community, and help in preventing abuse. In the case of Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children, they are expected to help parents and children understand online risks, promote safe internet use, and coordinate with schools, churches,

and even law enforcement when necessary. Moreover, many Barangays Council's struggle to do this work. Most of them are lack of proper training to deal with online issues, since OSAEC is more complicated compared to traditional forms of abuse. Many barangays also have limited funds and resources to conduct seminars or awareness campaigns. In some cases, people in the community are not fully aware of what OSAEC is, so cases may remain hidden or unreported (UNICEF on OSAEC, 2021).

In Davao Region, these issues are becoming more visible. As more families have access to mobile phones and the internet, children are increasingly exposed to risks online. At the same time, parents and caregivers may not always supervise or guide them, especially when they are busy with their work. This study uses systematic review to critically examine existing literature on the role the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs) in combating Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) with relevance to local context. By systematically identifying, reviewing, and synthesizing available studies, this research seeks to highlight the effectiveness and challenges faced by BCPCs in addressing OSAEC. It intends to contribute to increased community awareness, particularly in parents and youth, by emphasizing the seriousness of OSAEC and reinforcing the shared responsibility of families, communities, and local governance structures in preventing online child exploitation.

OBJECTIVES

This paper is systematically reviewed published studies on the effectiveness and challenges of the barangay-level mechanism, particularly the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs) in combating Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (OSAEC). This study focuses on the attaining objectives:

- 1) To examine the documented effectiveness of barangay-level interventions based on the existing empirical and policy-oriented studies; and
- 2) To analyse the key challenges affecting the performance of barangay-level mechanism in combating OSAEC, particularly those related to the availability of resources, capacity-building training, inter-agency coordination, cultural barriers, technological readiness, and community reporting mechanisms.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic literature review design guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines to ensure a transparent, structured, and replicable process in examining the effectiveness and challenges in barangay-level mechanisms, particularly the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs), in combating Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (OSAEC). A comprehensive search was conducted across academic databases and institutional repositories, including Google Scholar, Academia, Research Gate, Springer and PubMed and official publications from UNICEF, ECPAT International, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), covering studies published between 2015 and 2025. The explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, limiting the review to peer-reviewed articles, government reports, and institutional studies published in English that employed qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research designs with empirical or policy-based evidence and had a clear focus on barangay-level or community-based responses to OSAEC.

Figure 1 below shows the PRISMA flowchart, which outline the stage of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, with data systematically extracted using a standard matrix capturing study design, data resources, key findings, and reported challenges and outcomes. This method analysed through thematic synthesis, which identified six dominant themes: resources, training, coordination, cultural barriers, technology, and community reporting that shaped the effectiveness of barangay-level mechanism in addressing OSAEC.

Academic databases and institutional repositories were systematically searched to identify relevant literature on barangay-level mechanisms in combating Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC). The search utilized predefined keywords combined with Boolean operators to optimize retrieval and ensure contextual relevance. Searches were conducted in Google Scholar, Academia, Research Gate, Springer and PubMed, and institutional sources such as UNICEF, ECPAT International, INTERPOL, and Philippine Government Agencies (DSWD and DILG). The search covered studies published between 2015 and 2025. A total of 112 records were identified. After the duplicates were removed, title and abstract screening, and full-text

eligibility assessment in accordance with PRISMA 2020 guidelines, 18 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis.

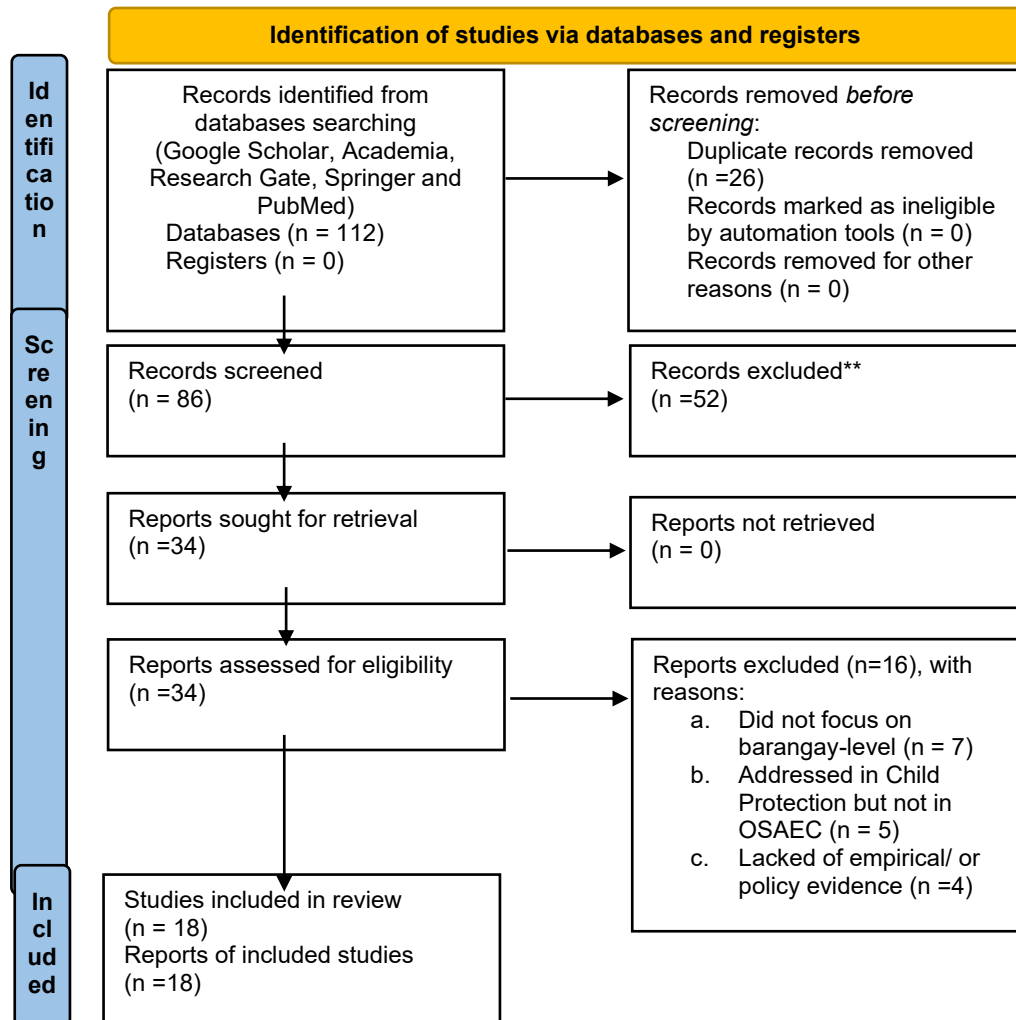


Figure 1. Selection Flow using PRISMA Guidelines

Database/ Sources	Number of Studies	Key Themes Identified
Google Scholar	7	Resources, Training, Coordination, cultural Barriers, Community Reporting
Academia.edu	3	Training, Resources, Coordination
ResearchGate	3	Training, Technology, Coordination
Springer	3	Technology, Coordination, Community Reporting
PubMed	2	Community Reporting, Technology, Psychosocial response

Table 1. Summary of Distribution of Studies and Key Themes in Peer-Reviewed Journals and Databases

Table 1 summarizes the sources of the studies included in the systematic review and the dominant themes derived from each database. Google Scholar yielded the largest share of included studies (n=7), largely addressing issues related to resources, capacity-building, coordination, and community reporting at the barangay level. Studies obtained from Academia.edu (n=3) mainly examined training limitations and resource availability within Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs). ResearchGate (n=3) contributed research that explored the role of digital tools and inter-agency coordination in responding to Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC). Springer (n=3) provided peer-reviewed articles that focused on governance

structures, coordination challenges, and technology-related concerns in local child protection efforts. Meanwhile, PubMed (n=2) included studies emphasizing community-based reporting systems, online risks, and psychosocial support mechanism for OSAEC cases. Collectively, these findings indicate that the existing literature places strong emphasis on institutional capacity and coordination as central factors shaping the effectiveness of barangay-level responses to OSAEC.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This systematic literature review, conducted according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) framework, to analyzed 18 studies published between 2015 and 2025 to investigate the capacity, effectiveness, and challenges faced by the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs) in combating Online sexual Abuse and Exploitation of children (OSAEC). The review identified and analyzed six key themes: availability of resources, capacity-building training, inter-agency coordination, cultural barriers, technological readiness, and community reporting mechanisms, which collectively shaped the effectiveness of barangay responses to OSAEC.

Availability of Resources. The reports from the UNICEF, ECPAT, and INTERPOL the frontline community actors worldwide often lack the funding, personnel, and infrastructure necessary to sustain long-term interventions against child exploitation (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, some studies found that local budgets rarely set aside resources specifically for OSAEC-related interventions, with most allocations instead directed toward general welfare services such as health and daycare (Roche, 2021). The Barangay Council's for the Protection of Children (BCPCs) often operate with limited funds, few dedicated staff, and inadequate infrastructure such as confidential spaces or transportation for referrals, which constrains their effectiveness (UNICEF on OSAEC, 2021). Research by Byrnes et al. (2024) shows that barangays struggle to sustain case management and community prevention campaigns because BCPC members typically fulfil their child protection duties alongside multiple other barangay responsibilities. The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG MC no. 2016-115) has issued memoranda and model ordinances encouraging barangays to allocate budget portions to BCPC functions, including child protection activities. Yet, government assessments reveal inconsistent adoption of these policies, with many barangays either failing to enact the ordinances or implementing them weakly, leaving BCPCs without stable financial support. The Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act No. 7160), in section 329-334, provides mechanisms for barangay budget programming and access to local development funds, but the limited technical capacity of Barangay Council's for the Protection on Children members in budget planning often prevents these funds from being realized. Program evaluations also shows that barangays benefiting from external support, such as UNICEF or NGO initiatives, temporarily enhance their BCPC services (Save the Children, 2022). Without integrating these externally funded programs into the LGUs regular operators and financial systems, their impact often fades once external partners withdraw. These findings collectively highlight a critical gap between policy, resource availability, and operational capacity at the barangay level, severely impacting the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of child protection interventions, especially those related to OSAEC.

Capacity Building Training. The Disrupting Harm study UNICEF, ECPAT, & INTERPOL (2022) particularly noted that many children fail to report online abuse because service providers and gatekeepers lack the skills and confidence to guide them through the reporting and referral process. However, in the Philippine government has recognized this challenge and taken steps to institutionalize training for duty-bearers. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), through the Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography (IACACP), launched an e-learning program that blends online modules, interactive activities, and face-to-face sessions designed to train social workers and community partners in handling OSAEC cases (Austria, K. S., (2022). This effort demonstrates a shift toward scalable and accessible training solutions, particularly during and after the pandemic. Complementing this, the SaferKidsPH Consortium, composed of INICEF, Save the Children, and The Asia Foundation, has worked closely with national agencies to build the capacities of local government officials, barangay councils, and justice actors to better understand the new provision under Republic Act 11930, the Anti-OSAEC and CSAEM law. These national efforts indicate growing recognition that combating OSAEC requires more than legislation; it demands continuous learning and skills development for those at the frontline of protection, (SaferKidsPH Consortium, 2022). The World Vision's Project (2023) facilitated trainings sessions for barangay leaders and social workers to improve their grasp of anti-trafficking and anti-OSAEC laws. These interventions showed promising results, with local officials reporting greater confidence in

handling sensitive cases. Yet research also reveals that once external funding or NGO support ends, the continuity of such training becomes uncertain and many BCPC members are unavailable to attend follow-up workshops due to competing barangay responsibilities, limited access to the internet, or lack of time (Agustin, M., 2020). The literature suggests that while global and national actors are investing in building the capacities of community-based protection councils, the sustainability of these efforts at the barangay level remains fragile. These findings highlight that national capacity-building training efforts for child protection are achieving promising results and boosting confidence in the short term, but their long-term effectiveness is consistently undermined by the barangay level's inability to sustain continuous training due to competing duties and lack of institutional support.

Inter-agency Coordination. The Philippines has built institutional frameworks to strengthen coordination in addressing Online Sexual Abuse Exploitation of Children (DSWD, 2024). The Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking (IACAT) and the Inter-Agency Council Against Child Pornography (IACACP) were established to consolidate the roles of different agencies such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Philippine National Police (PNP), the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), and the Department of Justice (DOJ). According to David et al. (2022), these inter-agency councils are critical in harmonizing protocols, improving case referrals, and enhancing surveillance systems. The Consortium (2023), also emphasized that partnerships between government agencies and civil society organizations help to bridge the capacity gaps by supporting awareness campaigns, providing technical expertise, and facilitating child-centered justice processes. However, studies point out that inter-agency coordination remains inconsistent, with bureaucratic overlaps and limited resources often delays in case handling. A study of Alampay and Raza (2020) found that barangay-level councils play an important role in bridging families, schools, and social workers during OSAEC cases. Initiatives such as World Vision's Project Against Child Exploitation (ACE) have strengthened coordination between barangay officials, local government units, and national agencies by providing referral pathways and standardized reporting forms (World Vision, 2023). Despite of these efforts, coordination often hesitates due to overlapping mandates, lack of trust among institutions, and limited training in child-sensitive approaches. Community-level actors also struggle with bureaucratic red tape when escalating cases from barangays to mandates, lack of trust among institutions, and limited training in child-sensitive approaches, (UNICEF Philippines, 2023). However, BCPCs effectively combat OSAEC; coordination must not only be institutionalized but also practiced in ways that are child-centered, culturally sensitive, and inclusive of community voices. Without such meaningful collaboration, OSAEC interventions risk becoming fragmented and ineffective, leaving children vulnerable to cycles of exploitation (Republic Act No. 11930 IRR., 2022). These findings collectively show that while formal national bodies successfully harmonize protocols, inter-agency coordination remains inconsistent at the community level, causing case delays due to bureaucratic red tape, overlapping mandates, and lack of trust, which risks fragmenting child protection efforts unless collaboration is made.

Cultural Barriers. Study of Maslang (2024) emphasize that cultural norms play a significant role in shaping both the risks of online sexual exploitation of children (OSAEC) and the effectiveness of responses. ECPAT International (2019) highlighted that harmful cultural beliefs, such as disobedience to elders, silence about sexual violence, or stigma against victims often discourage children and families from disclosing abuse. However, cultural perceptions of childhood, gender roles, and family honour strongly influence whether communities recognize sexual exploitation as abuse or dismiss it as private matter. These cultural barriers create silence and denial, limiting the effectiveness of global interventions unless they are adapted to local realities. The national study on OSAEC by UNIEF Philippines (2021) revealed that deep-rooted poverty combined with strong family obligations sometimes drives parents or relatives to tolerate, or even facilitate, OSAEC for financial survival. Study of Reyes and Salvosa (2019) explained that strong family loyalty can stop children from reporting abuse if the abuser is a family member. Many people also still blame victims, thinking it is the child's fault for going online, which adds shame and makes it harder for survivors to get help. Even though there are laws and policies, fear of judgement and exclusion often prevents families from reporting and seeking support. Roche (2021) observed that barangay leaders sometimes minimize cases of child sexual exploitation to keep good relationships in the community or avoid conflict with powerful families. This tendency to avoid confrontation can delay proper referrals and deny justice to victims. A study by SaferKidsPH (2023) added that in some barangays, people hesitate to report cases because of shame, and fear of retaliation, which leads to underreporting and hidden abuse. On the other hand, when BCPCs use culturally sensitive strategies, such as

working with faith-based leaders, elders, and women's groups, community awareness and reporting improve. These findings shows that cultural barriers including victim-blaming, family honour, and poverty drive silence, denial, and underreporting of OSAEC, often causing community leaders to minimize cases, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive community-engaged responses.

Technology Readiness. Technology is both a driver of Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) and a tool for combating it, (Maslang, E. et al., 2024). Europol (2020) reported that the rise of encrypted messaging, livestreaming, and anonymous payment systems has made online sexual abuse more widespread and harder to track. Latonero (2018) also noted that while technology creates serious risks, it can also be used to fight exploitation through digital forensics, artificial intelligence, and online monitoring systems. However, these tools are not equally available everywhere, and low-resource communities struggle to use them, putting local child protection workers at a disadvantage. The Philippines is both a hotspot for OSAEC and a country making efforts to respond with technology. Study shows that the easy access to cheap internet and mobile phones has fuelled livestreamed exploitation, often done in homes, (Roche, 2021). To address this, the Department of Justice's Office of Cybercrime, together with law enforcement agencies, has set up digital forensics labs, evidence systems, and partnerships with global internet companies to track child sexual abuse materials, (UNICEF Philippines 2021). However, David et al. (2022) pointed out that many frontline agencies lack the training and equipment to handle digital evidence, and national programs often depend foreign donors, making-long term support uncertain. The Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs) face the biggest challenges in technology. Study of Roche (2021) shows that many BCPCs still rely on manual reporting and informal communication, which shows down referrals and risks data leaks. Despite this, some barangays have tried new approaches, such as working with NGOs to use mobile reporting apps that let people report cases anonymously (Worl Vision, 2023). These tools help, but they are not widely used and often depend on outside funding or active local leaders. The literature shows that technology is both a risk and a solution in the fight against OSAEC. Global tools and national programs can help, but without proper digital infrastructure, training, and lasting partnerships, barangays will remain limited in protecting children. For Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children to work effectively, technology must be available, affordable, and to use in local communities.

Community Reporting. Study of Roche (2023) noted that digital contribute to under reported because community members are unaware of what constitute online abuse or unsure of where to report incidents. It also observed that improving community education and simplifying reporting procedures can enhance reporting rates and case responses (ECPAT International, 2021). The National Study on Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children by UNICEF Philippines (2021) revealed that one in every 100 Filipino children has been involved in Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSAEC), often driven by poverty and easy access to technology. Despite of these challenges, several studies highlight effective practices that strengthen the Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children's role in reporting and preventing Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSAEC). The Municipal Government of Kiblawan are rural areas and have limited access to internet connectivity and child protection resources. Local Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children have been formed as part of compliance with national directives, yet consistent monitoring and evaluation remain limited. Similar to findings in other provinces, community awareness of online sexual exploitation remains low, and cases are often unreported due to fear, shame or lack of understanding of the reporting process. These findings highlights that strengthening Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children through training, coordination with Provincial Social Welfare Development Office (PSWDO) and integrating local education campaigns can enhance the community role in identifying and reporting OSAEC cases.

Effectiveness of Barangay-Level Interventions

The Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children are designated as the frontline actors with an important function in prevention, early detection, operation of referral systems, and community awareness against OSAEC. This role is anchored in the fact that the BCPC, as mandated by the Children & Youth Welfare Code (PD 603), is the first line of defense for protecting children, working closest with families and neighbors. Their task includes watching over children, raising community awareness, and preventing abuse. Specifically concerning on OSAEC, the barangay council members are expected to help the parents and children to understand online risks, and to promote safe internet use, and coordinate with law enforcement and other sectors. The systematic search across database like google Scholar, Academia.edu, ResearchGate, Springer and

PubMed highlighted that institutional capacity, inter-agency coordination being the most frequently addressed theses in the identified literature.

Challenges Affecting BCPC Performance

Despite these mandates, BCPCs face significant obstacles in performing their function, largely because OSAEC is more complex than traditional forms of abuse. The identified themes demonstrate specific areas of struggle: First, availability of resources is a major constraint, as many barangays operate with limited funds to conduct necessary seminars or awareness campaigns. Secondly, capacity building training is often lacking, as most barangay councils do not have the proper training to deal with technical and complex nature of online issues. Inter-agency coordination presents a challenge, despite it being a necessary task for BCPCs to partner with schools, churches, and law enforcement. Fourthly, cultural barriers are evident as community members may not be fully aware of what OSAEC is, which allows cases to remain hidden or unreported. The technological readiness is a concern, particularly in regions like Davao, where the increasing family access to mobile phones and the internet exposes children to risks while parents may not always supervise or guide them. The limitations in community reporting mechanism are tied to all overall lack of awareness and technical complexity of reporting online abuse.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concludes that Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs) are critical, indispensable actors in the local government structure tasked with combating Online Sexual Abuse or Exploitation of Children (OSAEC). However, the literature analysis reveals that the BCPCs effectiveness is substantially hampered by a combination of systematic and operational weaknesses. These key weaknesses include a shortage of adequate financial resources, a gap in capacity-building training tailored to online abuse, fragmented inter-agency coordination, prevalent cultural barriers that inhibit reporting, and insufficient technological readiness. Therefore, the study underscores that addressing these structural challenges to fulfill the BCPC's mandate as the first line of defense for children in the digital age. To address these issues and ensure the sustainable protection, a multi-disciplinary approach is necessary including:

1. Provide targeted technical assistance to BCPC members to ensure the full realization budgets like the 1% BCPC fund.
2. Embed continuous, context-sensitive training and the provision of practical tools within the LGU's regular operational systems to counter high turnover and competing duties.
3. Streamline inter-agency referral pathways and protocols to drastically reduce bureaucratic red tape between the barangay and national mandated agencies.
4. Actively engage trusted local gatekeepers to build awareness, challenge cultural silence, and destigmatize reporting and enhance BCPCs essential infrastructure, such as confidential spaces for interviews and dedicated transport for timely referrals.

Implementing these measures can transform the child protection landscape, creating a resilient consistently funded, culturally sensitive, and legally sound system that protects children from OSAEC and sustains long-term community well-being.

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