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ABSTRACT

Child labor remains a serious problem in many parts of the world. Many of the children involved live in underdeveloped countries. In Catarman, the capital town of Northern Samar, this social dilemma holds true. The economic state of the province as one of the poorest provinces of the country has great impact on the most vulnerable sectors of the province's populace, particularly the children. In fact, the Child Labor Committee of the municipality validated the existence of the following forms of child labor in the province: domestic helping; stevedoring; PD cab driving; farming; KTV or bar waiting; and vending. Non-government offices like United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Plan Philippines intervene to strengthen and implement appropriate measures to eradicate forms of child labor. This paper determined the parents' knowledge level about Catarman child labor and evaluated the effectiveness of the print materials used by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Plan Philippines in campaigning against child labor as perceived by the parents. A mix of quantitative (survey) and qualitative (key informant) was used in generating data on the perceptions of parents and their sources of information. As to the perceived effectiveness of the print materials, the following themes were used: attractiveness; comprehension, self-involvement and persuasion. A thematic analysis on the transcribed key informants interviews was employed for the qualitative part.

Keywords: Catarman, attractiveness, comprehension, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, child labor remains a serious problem in many parts of the world. Many of these children live in underdeveloped countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Same is the case in Catarman, the capital town of Northern Samar. To address the issue, many forms of initiatives are undertaken. A number of development programs aims to guarantee the right of children to be protected against all forms of child labor by strengthening the measures in eliminating child labor in the province were undertaken by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Plan Philippines. In Catarman context, the two mentioned NGOs are actively and consistently operating.

Being strong advocates to alleviate the quality of life of the children by nurturing and caring for them, it is imperative to examine its campaign materials as to their functionality and effectiveness to measure if their objectives are met. Hence, this study sought to assess the print communication approaches used in addressing the issue, particularly the interventions of organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Plan Philippines.

For this study, parents' level of knowledge on the issue and the adequacy and effectiveness of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Plan Philippines print materials are emphasized. It is important to note that one essential component of child labor eradication programs is the inclusion of parents' awareness-raising activities in project design. Above others, they must be highly informed and educated about child labor issues. How they perceived the problem matters.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative method specifically survey was used as this study entailed insights of people. Though this is not in itself a qualitative study, the research was partly based on qualitative method to broaden the perspective of this study, which was compared with the findings of the survey and to intensify social interaction between the researcher and the respondents. These qualitative elements do not have standard measures; rather, they are behavior, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs.

The populations of this study were parents residing in Catarman, Northern Samar. In determining the sample size for the survey, random sampling was used. Out of the 40 respondents, five key informants were selected by convenience selection method. The criteria for selection were primarily based on the following assumptions: wide exposure to children in all situations; the position they hold in the community; proximity to see child labor problems; and capability to evaluate print materials. This technique was helpful in estimating general knowledge and perception of a population regarding the subject of the study.

A questionnaire was used, which was written in English but with Ninorte-Samaron translation for quick comprehension since it is the most familiar dialect among all types of respondents. The researcher also had key informants. A one-page open-ended questionnaire in local language with rights of every child, reasons of child labor and forms of child labor in Catarman as categories was prepared to probe on parents' knowledge on child labor emphasizing the children's rights, causes and forms of child labor in Catarman, Northern Samar. As to the perceived effectiveness of the print materials, the following themes were used: attractiveness; comprehension, self-involvement and persuasion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The UNICEF mainly used Flyers and Posters in campaigning against child labor, while Plan Phil. utilized brochures and comics. The main offices of the NGOs distribute the print materials to local agencies. The design and content are not in any way modified, except for the translation of the text from English to Filipino or Visayas' local language.

For specific description, the flyer is 8.27"x11.69 in size and in vertical position. It is presented on high quality paper using two dominant colors, light yellow and light pink, with large clear font, contains short words and short sentences, uses simple sentence constructions, in bulleted phrases and written in local language. The title is informative, direct and catchy ("An Mga Katungod Han kada Bata" which means "the rights of every child"), includes illustrations of children being taken care of by parents, with books, and in school. On the other hand, the size of the poster is 21"x40", in horizontal position. It is presented on glossy material, contains only one sentence ("Protect children everywhere, all the time!"), texts are large and bold with four colors: blue for the background; white, yellow and red for the texts. It includes a photograph (extreme close up shot) of three poor but happy children. Poster elements are aligned vertically and horizontally with each other.

The brochure's size is 4"x5.5", is presented on high quality semi glossy paper and is written in English. It has six panels and very detailed information. The sentences and paragraphs are long and very colorful. Diagrams and photographs of children are included but cluttered. As to comic, the cover is very artistic, attractive and tells immediately the theme of the 8 stories in it. Characters in the stories at least contain some element that readers (parent or child) can relate to or are able to put themselves in their role. It is written in Filipino, uses short words and phrases. The last few pages feature "Ang Karapatan at Pananagutan ng Bawat Batang Pilipino" (in bulleted phrases) and R.A 9208: Batas Laban sa Trafficking o Pagkalakal ng Tao.

Out of 40 respondents, 16 responded that they are aware of the existence of the print materials used by UNICEF and Plan Phils. in child labor campaigns, 14 are somewhat aware and ten are not aware. The weighted mean of the respondents' level of awareness is 1.8 or somewhat aware. It can be assumed from the finding that parents do not often see or are not highly exposed to the print materials. It further suggests that the UNICEF and Plan Phils. should improve the circulation aspect and widen its scope or increase the number of print materials produced.

The overall mean average in the knowledge test on the rights of every child is 1.3, indicating that most of the parents are knowledgeable. Major rights of children that they have knowledge of are good education and development of child's potential, live in a child-friendly community, protection against abuse, exploitation, neglect, violence and anger and an adequate food and healthy body. While the least perceived children's rights are to have time to play and leisure and to be defended and given assistance by the government. The latter implies that respondents believe that children are first and foremost the responsibility of the parents.

On the knowledge of causes of child labor, the overall mean average is 1.7 which means that the parents are somewhat knowledgeable. The major perceived reasons are poverty and no access to education. They are only fairly knowledgeable of parents' illiteracy as a cause and not knowledgeable that lack or ineffective programs may result to child labor. The result indicates that parents accept as true that poverty is the root cause of child labor. Children had no choice but to engage themselves even in hazardous and exploitative works in order to survive. Along with this is the lack of access to education which is always closely related with poverty. In many underdeveloped areas like in some rural barangays in Catarman, schools are not accessible due to distance. In effect, parents prefer not to send their children to school for lack or insufficient money for the travel and allowance costs. The major forms of child labor in Catarman known to parents are stevedoring and PD cab driving. They are somewhat knowledgeable that KTV or bar waiting and fish/fruits/vegetables vending are the common types of child labor. Meanwhile, parents are not knowledgeable that domestic helping and farming are among the forms of child labor. The overall mean average in this area of knowledge is 1.9, signifying that the parents are somewhat knowledgeable about the usual child labor incidents in Catarman. The result implies that

parents believe that the common forms of child labor in Catarman, Northern Samar are PD cab driving and stevedoring. This is probably because town is the commercial center of the province. In commercial areas and public transportation terminals, a child carrying heavy passengers' baggage is a common sight. Child driving a PD cab, which is the primary means of transportation within the town, is also prevalent.

On the other hand, farming and domestic helping are not perceived as types of child labor. This can be attributed to respondents' level of exposure to child laborers. Farming is common in rural and/ or remote barangays of Catarman, while children who work as domestic helpers are not visible in Catarman for they are usually sent to Metro Manila and other urban areas in the country.

The overall frequency of the effectiveness of the print materials is 28.5, meaning that parents perceived the materials as moderate in terms of attractiveness, comprehension, self-involvement and persuasion. Clearly, parents' perception is not high as regards the effectiveness of the print materials used by UNICEF and Plan Phil.

Flyer is perceived by 32 parents as effective, 30 or effective for comics, 27 or moderate for poster and brochure with 25 or moderate. The result shows that Flyer is perceived as the most effective among the four print materials as opposed to the perception of the 5 key informants who considered comic book as the most effective among the four print materials under study. On the rights of every child, all five key informants stated that every child has the right to obtain education, up to tertiary level if possible. According to them, the lack of education breeds child labor. Other rights identified are the right to be protected against any form of abuses and the right to have time to play. It is mainly perceived by the parents that these three aspects should not be neglected for the development of a child.

As regards the reasons of child labor, all, except one parent mentioned that poverty and both parents and children's lack of education are the major causes. While the main perceived forms of child labor in Catarman are PD cab driving and stevedoring.

All key informants perceived that comic book is the most effective among the print materials used by the UNICEF and Plan Phils. It was stressed by the parents that the material is attractive for it used colors that are pleasing to the eyes and the texts are easy to read. Also, the message is immediately conveyed for it is written in a language so familiar to them. The message is direct and is focused on the forms and causes of child labor.

The key informants thought that the material is intended for parents like them since in the stories; parents' roles in combating child labor are highlighted. Regarding persuasion, they found the stories compelling and persuasively asking readers in particular to address child labor issues.

Generally, the results of the study give hindsight that there are some knowledge and perceptions of child labor as a social problem. Good education, child-friendly community and protection against abuses, harm, neglect and violence were identified as the primary rights of every child. Although it appeared that parents have little knowledge of the rights to have time to play and leisure and to be defended and given assistance by the government, these two are equally important rights that should be afforded to children. When parents don't recognize the children's right to play, the latter will always be prompted to work by the former.

Most know that poverty is the compelling force of child labor. The induced pressure to escape from this plight forced children to work with meager pay and under hazardous conditions. However, parents are also aware that poverty is not solely the reason of the problem. Lack or low level of education on the part of the parents and no access to education on the part of the children are significantly associated with child labor. It also surfaced in the results of the study that child labor is not only perceived as a social problem, but a communication problem as well. From development communication's perspective, social problems are countered through effective communication. It has been shown in the study that print materials are fundamental to child labor programs. The power of development communication in addressing and solving societal problems cannot be undermined.

Hence, there is a vast need of effective child labor campaign materials designed and produced based on the nature of development communication, to wit: purposive, pragmatic, mass oriented, scientific in outlook, relevant and value-laden.

Further, it can be implied from the study that parents have some valuable perceptions on the effectiveness of print materials used by the UNICEF and Plan Phils. in campaigning against child labor. Parents perceived print materials as powerful interventions in solving child labor by raising awareness and providing options to improve the quality of life of child laborers.

The parents' perceived effectiveness is a relevant contribution to individuals and agencies in conceptualizing print material designs to ensure that the objectives of the material are met.

As regards the visual design and content of the print materials, the results of the study infer that attractiveness, comprehension, self-involvement and persuasion must be considered. To be effective, parents supposed that the print material's graphics and colors should not be harsh to the eyes and the font size of the text must be readable. Comprehensibility must be high and should use language that is familiar to the intended readers. Similarly, parents regarded print material as effective in campaigning against child labor when it involves and directly talks to them and gives information that is useful in translating the message into concrete actions.

The findings of the study also imply that that effectiveness of print materials is relative in achieving an objectively measurable behavioral outcome. There are no standard visual designs to be followed, instead, must be flexible according to the needs of the target audience. For instance, in this study, poster & brochure's effectiveness is regarded as moderate on the ground that the materials were not designed for parents. In the interviews, it was revealed that the brochure is suitable for policy makers and audience with higher degree of education since the information is written in English, used technical jargon, long words and complex sentences. While the poster is deemed moderately effective for the message is too broad as opposed to flyer and comic book where messages are presented in a very specific manner. Meanwhile, the comic book and flyer contained the essential items on how to eliminate child labor with short but clear explanation and appropriate graphics that substantiate the text of the materials.

The finding that the presence of attractiveness, comprehension, self-involvement and persuasion in the design and content of the print materials have strong impact on their effectiveness is not surprising. Many literatures opine that these characteristics must be present in any print material geared at social development. Clearly, the result does run counter to what might be expected by individuals who are in the field of development communication, who often recommend using these measures in the design and content to ensure that child labor print materials are effective.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Undoubtedly, there are identified child labor cases in the municipality. Parents understand that some children with damaging effects on their education, health and moral are carrying out PD cab driving and stevedoring. Poverty is perceived by majority of the parents as the primary cause, but lack of education was also correlated with child labor.

Regarding the level of knowledge, it appears that there is a need to increase the knowledge of the parents about child labor issues; however, the need is no longer high. On matter of effectiveness, parents' assessments are valid and are applicable to actual conditions. In fact, are useful as major yardsticks in future design and production of child labor campaign materials, particularly those that are intended for parents.

This research suggests that in designing and producing print materials for development, it must be based on information that is accurate and appropriate under a given situation. Further, print materials will likely be perceived more effective when evaluated by parents of child laborers than by general the population of parents. It is likewise recommended that NGOs working for the elimination of child labor continue to use print materials that are designed according to the principles of development communication. Distribution of materials must be sustained with wider scope of areas. Orchestrated child labor campaigns with emphasis on information dissemination using effective print materials and directed to parents must be prioritized.

Finally, it is recommended that larger studies of similar nature be made to provide stronger conjectures on effective communication of child labor issues for social development.

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