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## STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID AS A RESPONSE INTERVENTION TO CONFLICT-AFFECTED TEACHERS IN MARAWI CITY

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### ABSTRACT

Education is one of the most vulnerable sectors of society that bears the brunt of a large-scale disaster or crisis. The Marawi City siege which started on May 23, 2017 and lasted until October 2017 caused a state of education failure following displacement of people with an affected population estimated at 1.1 million. The five-month long war in Marawi caused the displacement of 35,016 learners and 1,411 teachers from the Schools Division of Marawi City. Out of the 69 public schools in Marawi City, there were 20 severely affected schools and 49 that needed repair.

One of the recent interventions designed for and undertaken in the education sector to ensure education continuity and well-being of teachers and learners when a crisis or disaster strikes is Psychological First Aid (PFA). This study examined the usefulness of the PFA modular intervention provided by the Department of Education and partners to teachers affected by the month-long Marawi City siege through a survey of teacher perceptions based on personal experience. This work explored the protective factors against post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) of the conflict-affected teachers and what are typical among crisis survivors. Assessment of PFA by service providers were collected in terms of perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC) of the overall delivery. This work is a source of information and evidence pertinent in the development of DepEd PFA Manual for Personnel and Guidebook for Field Workers.

Quantitative and qualitative research strategies were employed in the study having two types of respondents: PFA recipients and providers. Facilitated Group Discussion (FGD), Key

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Informants Interview (KII) and interview questionnaire were the methods used in the qualitative data-gathering. Two distinct sets of questions were made for identifying protective factors against PTSD among teachers and for gathering data for the SWOC as perceived by PFA Providers. In the quantitative method, a self-made survey questionnaire (Likert scale) was utilized. The self-made questionnaire used is a 32-item measure of perceptions of Psychological First Aid. This measure is a self-made survey questionnaire by the researcher based on the objectives of PFA adopted from the World Health Organization. The statements were carefully constructed with reference to the study "Possible Emotions Shown by Adults When Terrible Things Happen" by Brymer et al., (2008) that explained negative and positive responses based on the cognitive, emotional, social and physiological domains. This is also grounded on the four psychosocial theories namely: Learned Optimism (Seligman, 1991), Stress and Coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1987), Social Support (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and Self-Efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). The questionnaire has four different subscales designed to measure the four extents of perceived effectiveness of PFA in terms of 1) Validating and Normalizing Feelings; 2) Calming and Controlling One's Emotions; 3) Linking: Identifying and Addressing Needs; and 4) Sources of Strength. Each dimension is measured by 4 items on a 4-point scale ranging from "To a Great Extent" to "Not at All".

Respondents who took part in this study were selected teachers in conflict-affected public schools in the Schools Division of Marawi City who were provided psychological first aid by the Department of Education through the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Service and partners during and after the first six months from the end of the war. The PFA Providers in the conducted PFA in Marawi City are also respondents in this study. This research is limited within the context of a conflict situation, the specific nature of the participants and PFA employed in the area.

DepEd's initiative in collaboration with partners to conduct trainings and actual PFA interventions is still in a stage of infancy. As a developing practice in the country, the intervention needs to broaden assessment of field use and substantiation of its usefulness and suitability in various contexts of disaster response. The scarcity of evidence proving the effectiveness of PFA despite its proliferation worldwide as a response intervention for disaster survivors during emergency phase provided an impetus for this research in uncovering beneficial inputs for psychosocial support interventions apt in the local setting and informed by evidence.

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This study concludes that PFA is a valuable intervention as experienced by the respondents. This work attests that the intervention based on the recipients is an acceptable mechanism recognized as helpful and supportive. It is concluded that the protective factors have a strong link to culture and thought processes of a person in relation to its environment. Most of the protective factors revealed in this study are also the target attributes that are being strengthened using the approaches and strategies on PFA as a modular tool. It can be assumed that although protective factors are part of the dynamics of a person and are not attributable to PFA, the intervention in some similar features can be a potential booster or mender. Knowledge and experiences-sharing by field workers are vital in the development of PFA practices. Documentation is encouraged for future use as well as development of localized tools for monitoring and assessment.

To strengthen mental health practices in the country, policymakers must realize the existing gaps and scarcity of resources and provide avenues in providing for additional funding support for mental health services. The Mental Health Act should have a clearer emphasis on provisions for mental health in emergencies. Practitioners and experts on disaster and crisis management are advised to broaden knowledge on the effects of adversities to which the country is very much risk-prone by seeing the effects of disasters and emergencies beyond physical and economic aspects, but rather see them in other lenses such as mental health in all phases of disaster management. Future studies are encouraged on Psychological First Aid in terms of adaptation in the country, effectiveness, and gaps. Additionally, the kind of intervention appropriate in a specific hazard, PSS intervention for minorities and those with various exceptionalities.

**Keywords:** mental health, psychological first aid, crisis, war, conflict in education, education in emergencies, disaster, disaster response, disaster intervention, protective factors, resilience, posttraumatic stress disorder, teachers, well-being, Marawi siege, DRRM, education, education continuity

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