

Original Article

Frontline Realities: Social Workers' Experiences in Interviewing Sexually Abused Children in Mountain Province, Philippines

Parline Angyap Tafaleng-Ullalim^{1,2} 

¹College of Criminal Justice Education, University of the Cordilleras, Baguio, Philippines

²School of Criminal Justice Education and Liberal Arts, Mountain Province State University, Bontoc, Philippines

Correspondence:

ptu1892@students.uc-bcf.ph / parlineullalim727@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: In the Philippines, roughly one in five children experiences sexual victimization. In Mountain Province, northern Luzon, municipal social workers serve as first responders and disclosure-stage interviewers, yet little is known about how they work without child-friendly facilities, standardized protocols, or clinical supervision.

Methods: This narrative inquiry engaged all ten designated municipal lead handlers of child sexual abuse cases, a total enumeration of the eligible population. Semi-structured interviews, conducted primarily in Ilocano with code-switching into Kankanaey or Bontok, were transcribed and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Trustworthiness was addressed through member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, and an audit trail.

Results: Six interrelated challenges were constructed: building rapport, emotional barriers to disclosure, developmental limitations among very young children and those with cognitive disabilities, family and community interference and stigma, environmental and systemic constraints, and secondary traumatic stress with burnout. Three adaptive strategies emerged: gradual rapport building and child-centered adaptation; flexible communication, improvised aids, and boundary management with families; and informal peer-based emotional processing.

Conclusion: Practitioner adaptation is absorbing the costs of structural deficits in the child protection system. Dedicated child-friendly interview spaces, a locally adapted disclosure-stage protocol, validated visual aids, and institutionalized supervision and debriefing are needed as occupational health entitlements.

Keywords

child protection, child sexual abuse, disclosure-stage interviewing, narrative inquiry, secondary traumatic stress, trauma-informed care, Philippines, UN SDG 3, UN SDG 16

INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is among the most consequential concerns in contemporary child protection scholarship. Meta-analytic estimates place the prevalence of self-reported childhood sexual abuse at between 12 and 18 percent among girls and 7 and 8 percent among boys (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011), and recent multi-country epidemiological work suggests these figures have not meaningfully declined (Mathews et al., 2023). The state's obligation to address such violence is enshrined in Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of

the Child (United Nations, 1989) and reaffirmed under Sustainable Development Goal 16.2.

In the Philippines, the most reliable population-level estimate comes from the National Baseline Study on Violence Against Children, which found that approximately one in five Filipino children aged 13 to 24 had experienced some form of sexual violence in childhood, with most cases perpetrated by persons known to the child (Council for the Welfare of Children et al., 2016; Ramiro et al., 2010). Regional data are sparser but consistent in pattern. In the Cordillera Administrative Region, sexual abuse is the most frequently reported form of violence against children handled by local protection bodies, with girls aged ten to seventeen carrying the heaviest disclosed burden (Lafadchan et al., 2022). Within Mountain Province, the Provincial Council on Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Violence Against Women and Children (PCAT-VAWC) recorded 28 cases of child sexual abuse in 2023 and 25 in 2024 (PCAT-VAWC, 2024), figures that almost certainly understate true incidence given the well-documented pattern of disclosure delay and underreporting in this field (Alaggia et al., 2019; Easton, 2013).

The country has built a relatively dense legal and policy architecture around child protection. Republic Acts 7610, 9344, 9775, and 11930, together with the Department of Social Welfare and Development's operational protocols and the multidisciplinary case management framework anchored in the Women and Children Protection Unit and Child Protection Network system, set out the formal division of labor across the life of a case (Roche, 2017; Roche & Flynn, 2021). In rural municipalities, much of this responsibility devolves onto the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO), where the designated social worker functions as the first formal responder and lead interviewer at the disclosure stage, working alongside a Women and Children Protection Desk (WCPD) officer who carries the evidentiary lead. The international literature documents the occupational toll of this work (Bride, 2007; Figley, 1995; Sprang et al., 2011), and Southeast Asian and Philippine studies have added further texture, describing direct threats from perpetrators, family pressure to drop cases, and rapidly evolving online abuse modalities that have outpaced existing training (Dela Rosa et al., 2023; Sonio & Fabella, 2023; Tumwesigye, 2021). What this body of work shares, however, is a tendency to use a single vocabulary for what are in fact two related but distinct interviewing tasks.

Two terms recur in this literature and deserve careful disentangling. Forensic interviewing, in the technical sense, refers to a structured evidentiary procedure designed to elicit accounts admissible in court, typically guided by protocols such as the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Investigative Interview Protocol or the Achieving Best Evidence guidance (Lamb et al., 2007; Newlin et al., 2015). In the Philippine multidisciplinary system, this formal interview is conducted by WCPD officers and, at higher referral levels, by trained Women and Children Protection Unit clinicians and prosecutors (Roche & Flynn, 2021). The interview conducted by the municipal social worker at the disclosure stage is conceptually distinct, though it carries forensic implications because what is said may later inform case-building. It is more accurately a disclosure-stage interview combined with a psychosocial assessment: it establishes initial rapport, gathers a developmentally appropriate account, identifies immediate safety needs, and feeds into the formal forensic interview that follows. The distinction matters because much of what the participants in this study do has been read in the wider literature through a forensic lens that fits only imperfectly with the disclosure-stage realities they describe. Throughout this manuscript, 'disclosure-stage interview' refers to what the participants do; 'forensic interview' is reserved for the formal protocolized procedure conducted downstream.

Three gaps in the existing literature shaped the present inquiry. First, most foundational forensic interviewing scholarship has been developed in well-resourced North American and European settings, where structured tools are typically embedded within child-friendly suites, multidisciplinary teams, and routine clinical supervision (Lamb et al., 2007; Newlin et al., 2015); much less is known about practitioner adaptation when none of that infrastructure is available. Second, Philippine and Southeast Asian scholarship has tended to emphasize policy review and survivor experience, with the day-to-day interpretive work of frontline social workers themselves receiving comparatively little attention (Sonio & Fabella, 2023; Tumwesigye, 2021). Third, the intersection of indigenous cultural contexts, scarce material resources, and trauma-informed practice in highland regions such as the Cordillera remains underdocumented. These three gaps are not independent of one another. They converge in a single empirical site: the disclosure-stage interview conducted by a frontline social worker in a rural, indigenous, and under-resourced setting. The present study was designed to examine

them together rather than in isolation, asking how municipal social workers carry out this work when the assumed infrastructure is absent (the implementation gap), how they adapt their practice in response (the adaptation gap), and how indigenous Cordilleran cultural frames intersect with material scarcity and trauma-informed expectations to shape what is possible inside the interview room (the cultural and contextual gap). It pursues these questions through the accounts of the ten municipal social workers who hold the lead role in child sexual abuse cases across Mountain Province.

Four conceptual lenses, operating at different levels of analysis, guided the inquiry. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory provided the overarching structure, situating a single interview within nested layers of influence, from the microsystem of the child and the interviewer through the mesosystem of family and community and the exosystem of police and justice institutions to the macrosystem of culture, law, and resource allocation, and offering a vocabulary for tracing how problems that surface in the interview room originate in higher-order institutional arrangements. The trauma-informed care framework of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA] (2014), built on principles of safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural responsiveness, supplied a practice-level benchmark against which to read the participants' work and interpret its gaps. The occupational toll noted earlier was approached through vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress theory (Figley, 1995; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995), with later measurement and intervention refinements (Bride, 2007; Lev et al., 2022; Sprang et al., 2011), which distinguishes the cumulative inner transformation of the sustained empathic helper from the more acute, post-traumatic symptom cluster that follows hearing about, rather than directly experiencing, traumatic events. Organizational resilience scholarship (Beddoe et al., 2014; Mansfield et al., 2016; McFadden et al., 2015) framed the institutional side, locating resilience not in individual stoicism but in the meso- and macro-level supports that sustain practitioners across long careers in high-distress fields. Used as sensitizing concepts rather than a fixed coding frame (Bowen, 2006), the four lenses oriented interpretation without predetermining it.

Accordingly, the present study examines how municipal social workers in Mountain Province navigate disclosure-stage interviews with sexually abused children within a rural, indigenous, and resource-constrained child protection system. Drawing on the narratives of all designated municipal lead social workers across the province and interpreted through ecological systems theory, trauma-informed care, secondary traumatic stress theory, and organizational resilience, the study investigates the challenges they encounter, the adaptive strategies they employ, and the institutional conditions that shape frontline interviewing practice. By generating contextually grounded evidence from an understudied Philippine setting, the study contributes to the limited literature on disclosure-stage interviewing in low-resource environments. It provides an empirical foundation for strengthening child protection policy, workforce support, and trauma-informed practice in comparable settings.

METHODS

Research Design

A narrative inquiry approach was used, working from the premise that the stories practitioners tell about their work carry their own analytic structure (Polkinghorne, 1988), and attending to the three commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The analysis was conducted from a contextualist position (Braun & Clarke, 2021), treating the participants' accounts as situated reports that are meaningful at once as descriptions of practice and as products of the institutional and cultural settings in which that practice occurs, rather than as a transparent window onto an external reality, as a realist reading would have it, or as purely discursive constructions. Reflexive thematic analysis organized the analytic work.

Study Setting

The study was conducted across the ten municipalities of Mountain Province, a landlocked highland province in the Cordillera Administrative Region of northern Luzon, characterized by mountainous terrain, dispersed rural communities, and a predominantly indigenous Cordilleran population, principally of the Kankanaey and Bontok ethnolinguistic groups. Each municipality maintains an MSWDO, which serves as the primary entry point for child sexual abuse cases. Disclosure-stage interviews are typically conducted jointly

by the municipal social worker and a WCPD officer, generally in shared office spaces rather than in dedicated child-friendly rooms. There is no Women and Children Protection Unit within the province; cases requiring specialized medico-legal evaluation are referred to the regional center in Baguio City, several hours away.

Population and Sampling

The participants were the municipal social workers designated as lead handlers of child sexual abuse cases in each of the ten municipalities. This was not a purposive sample drawn from a larger pool but a complete enumeration of the eligible population: at the time of data collection, every municipality had exactly one designated lead handler, all ten were invited, and all ten took part, so no eligible practitioner was excluded and none declined or withdrew (Etikan et al., 2016). Eligibility required current employment as a municipal social worker, designation as the lead child sexual abuse case handler, and personal experience conducting at least one disclosure-stage interview with a child survivor in the preceding two years. Although the set is small, it is internally diverse in the dimensions relevant to the research question: the ten municipalities differ in population size, terrain, and remoteness from the regional center, and the practitioners differ in age, length of service, graduate training, and annual caseload. The enumeration, therefore, spans the full range of local government contexts and frontline experiences present in the province rather than a convenience selection from within it.

Because the entire eligible population participated, conventional saturation language requires care. Recent methodological scholarship has problematized the routine invocation of saturation as a proxy for sample adequacy (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Malterud et al.'s (2016) information power framework offers an analytically defensible alternative: adequacy increases with the specificity of the aim, the density of relevant participant experience, the quality of dialogue, the use of established theory, and the choice of in-depth case analysis over cross-case comparison. Each of these conditions held in the present study. The aim was narrowly focused on disclosure-stage interviewing in a particular institutional location; every participant occupied that position and carried substantial direct experience; interviews were conducted in the participants' working language by a researcher familiar with the setting; analysis was anchored in established theory; and the analytic strategy emphasized depth of single-case interpretation. Conceptual sufficiency was tracked across analysis (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022): codes, categories, and meanings stabilized by the eighth and ninth transcripts. Within narrative inquiry itself, depth and particularity in each story are prioritized over thematic redundancy at the dataset level (Kim, 2016). The empirical scope claim is therefore not statistical generalizability but conceptual transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to comparable rural and indigenous child protection settings.

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face in private rooms at each participant's MSWDO between January and June 2024. The interview guide, developed in consultation with two senior faculty members in social work and criminal justice and reviewed by an external child protection practitioner, covered five areas: participant background, training, and caseload; the conduct of the disclosure-stage interview, including rapport building, questioning, and the use of aids; challenges encountered with children, families, and the wider system; strategies and adaptations; and recommendations. The guide was pilot-tested with two municipal social workers from a neighboring Cordilleran province; minor revisions followed, and the pilot interviews were not included in the main analysis. Interviews were conducted primarily in Ilocano with code-switching into English and into Kankanaey or Bontok. Each interview ran 60 to 90 minutes, was audio-recorded with explicit written consent, and was followed by field notes.

The researcher's positionality shaped the conduct of the interviews and the interpretive work. As a Cordilleran faculty member in criminal justice at a state university within the study region, fluent in Ilocano and conversant in Kankanaey, she stood in an insider-researcher relation to participants (Berger, 2015; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009): culturally and linguistically proximate, professionally familiar, and known to several through prior inter-agency work. This positioning enabled culturally specific terms such as *ba-in* (a local concept of shame) and *inayan* (moral restraint) to be grasped without extended explanation, but carried the risk of taken-

for-granted readings. Three steps addressed this risk: a reflexive journal maintained throughout fieldwork and analysis (Finlay, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985); an interview guide that asked participants to describe practices as if explaining them to an outsider, surfacing tacit knowledge; and peer debriefing with a senior colleague outside the immediate field. Prior published work on child protection-relevant topics in the study region (Lafadchan et al., 2022) is acknowledged as part of the interpretive horizon.

Data analysis

Translation in cross-language qualitative research is itself an interpretive act (van Nes et al., 2010). Recordings were transcribed verbatim in the original language, and initial open coding was conducted on the original-language transcripts to ensure that early decisions were anchored in what the participants actually said. Transcripts were then translated into English, with culturally specific Cordilleran terms (for instance, *lawa*, meaning "what is forbidden") retained in the source language and glossed at first use. Translated excerpts were back-translated by a bilingual colleague to check meaning equivalence (Squires, 2009), and a selection was returned to participants during member checking.

Analysis followed the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021). The researcher familiarized herself with the dataset through repeated listening, repeated reading, and analytic memos. Line-by-line coding was carried out manually using a spreadsheet-based codebook; dedicated qualitative data analysis software was not used, the manual approach being a deliberate choice intended to keep the researcher in close interpretive contact with the participants' words. Codes were generated inductively, with the four theoretical lenses operating as sensitizing concepts. Codes were collated into candidate categories, tested against the full dataset with an explicit search for disconfirming instances, and named and defined as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Themes were understood in the reflexive tradition as patterns of shared meaning organized around a central interpretive idea, not as domain summaries or as topics counted by frequency. A pattern was treated as a theme when it carried analytic weight across several accounts and cohered around a single organizing concept; the boundary between one theme and the next was set interpretively, by judgment of where one organizing idea gave way to another, and was revised as coding proceeded. Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen over content analysis for precisely this reason: the aim was to construct meaning from situated accounts rather than to count the prevalence of predefined categories.

A senior social work faculty colleague independently coded a randomly selected 30 percent subset of the transcripts. Following the reflexive thematic analysis tradition, the second coder served not as the source of a reliability coefficient but as an analytic interlocutor whose alternative readings prompted scrutiny of code definitions and theme boundaries (Braun & Clarke, 2021; McDonald et al., 2019). Initial coding agreement across the subset reached approximately 87 percent at the code level. Disagreements were resolved by joint discussion rather than majority rule, with code definitions refined where ambiguity was identified; three code labels were re-specified, and two codes collapsed into a single, more analytically coherent category. The audit trail, comprising transcripts, the working codebook, intermediate category maps, memos, and successive theme drafts, is retained and available on reasonable request.

Trustworthiness was pursued across the four dimensions outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), with attention to recent refinements (Stahl & King, 2020). Credibility was addressed through prolonged engagement, member checking with seven of the ten participants, peer debriefing with two senior colleagues, and triangulation between transcripts, field notes, and agency documents. Transferability was supported through thick description. Dependability and confirmability were addressed through the audit trail and reflexive journal already described.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Cordilleras Research Ethics Committee (UC-REC), which issued the notice to proceed on 2 August 2025. Authorization to approach municipal social workers was issued separately by the Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office. Each participant received a written information sheet and gave written informed consent, with verbal reaffirmation before recording. Numeric identifiers (SW1 through SW10) replaced names, and any details that could have identified a participant or a child case were redacted before analysis. Audio files and transcripts were stored on a password-protected,

encrypted drive. The researcher monitored participants for signs of distress and provided a list of mental health and peer support resources at the close of each session. No data identifying any specific child case was collected. Prior professional acquaintance was acknowledged at the start of each interview, and participants were assured that participation was independent of any inter-agency role. A copy of the ethics clearance is attached as a supplementary file.

RESULTS

The accounts the participants offered were dense and layered. Across the ten interviews, two analytic domains came into view: a set of challenges that the social workers encountered, and a set of strategies they had assembled in response. The participant profile is set out first, followed by the six challenge themes and the three strategy themes.

Profile of Participants

All ten participants were women, currently employed as municipal social workers and serving as the lead handlers of child sexual abuse cases in their respective municipalities. Their ages ranged from 29 to 48, and their length of service ranged from 5 to 22 years. All held a Bachelor of Science in Social Work and were licensed Registered Social Workers; three had pursued graduate study. Every participant had attended at least the basic training on child protection and forensic interviewing, though depth and recency varied considerably. Between them, the participants handled 28 child sexual abuse cases in 2024 and 21 cases as of August 2025. Table 1 sets out the participant profile.

Table 1. *Demographic and Professional Profile of Participants (n = 10)*

Code	Age (yrs)	Civil Status	Education	Service (yrs)	Trainings on CSA / Child Protection	Cases 2024 (n)	Cases 2025 (n)
SW1	42	Married	BSW, RSW	15	Basic Forensic Interview Training; Child Protection Policy Orientation; Handling CICL	4	2
SW2	38	Married	BSW, RSW	12	Basic Forensic Interview Training; Trauma-Informed Care; VAWC Case Management	3	3
SW3	35	Single	BSW, RSW	8	Basic Forensic Interview Training; RA 7610 Orientation; Child-Friendly Investigation	2	1
SW4	45	Married	BSW, RSW, MPA	18	Basic and Advanced Forensic Interview; Child Protection Policy; Case Management for Abused Children; Handling OSAEC Cases	5	3
SW5	32	Married	BSW, RSW	6	Basic Forensic Interview; VAWC Protocol Training; RA 11930 Orientation	2	2
SW6	40	Married	BSW, RSW	14	Basic Forensic Interview Training; Trauma-Informed Care; Child Protection Policy; Psychological First Aid	3	2
SW7	36	Married	BSW, RSW	9	Basic Forensic Interview; Case Management for Abused Children; Handling CICL	3	3
SW8	48	Widow	BSW, RSW, MSW	22	Basic and Advanced Forensic Interview; Trauma-Informed Care; Child Protection Policy; Case Management; WCPU Coordination; Handling OSAEC Cases	4	2
SW9	29	Single	BSW, RSW	5	Basic Forensic Interview; VAWC Protocol Training; RA 7610 Orientation	1	2
SW10	33	Married	BSW, RSW, MPA units	7	Basic Forensic Interview Training; Child Protection Policy; Psychological First Aid	1	1

Note. BSW = Bachelor of Science in Social Work; RSW = Registered Social Worker; MSW = Master of Social Work; MPA = Master of Public Administration; CSA = child sexual abuse; CICL = Children in Conflict with the Law; OSAEC = Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children; VAWC = Violence Against Women and Children; WCPU = Women and Children Protection Unit. Case figures for 2025 reflect data collected up to August 2025.

The progression from raw extracts through illustrative codes and intermediate categories to the final themes is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Progression from Illustrative Codes through Categories to Themes

Theme	Categories	Illustrative Codes
Complexities in building rapport	Sustained trust building; multiple home and school visits; child unresponsiveness; gradual disclosure	'opening up takes weeks'; 'silence at the start'; 'stranger to the child'; 'safety before story'
Emotional barriers to disclosure	Crying and shutdown; flashbacks during recall; fear of disbelief; fear of repercussions	'too tired to continue'; 'flashbacks during questions'; 'afraid of the abuser'; 'will anyone believe me'
Developmental barriers to disclosure	Limited vocabulary in young children; cognitive disability; unclear timelines; fragmented memory	'no words to say'; 'community bell as time marker'; 'binary questions to narrow time'; 'special child cases'
Family and community interference and stigma	Family answering for the child; gatekeeping by guardians; community gossip; victim blaming; cultural emphasis on ba-in	'family answers for the child'; 'everyone knows everyone'; 'reputation over child'; 'refusing home visits'
Environmental and systemic constraints	No child-friendly room; intimidating police presence; missing tools; absence of standardized protocol	'office not child friendly'; 'uniformed personnel scare them'; 'no anatomical dolls'; 'sometimes I ask leading questions'
Secondary and vicarious traumatic stress with burnout	Intrusive thoughts after work; sleep disturbance; emotional exhaustion; absence of formal debriefing	'I dream about cases'; 'cannot leave it at the office'; 'no debriefing here'; 'prayer is my coping'
Adaptive strategies	Gradual rapport building; flexible communication; improvised visual aids; boundary management; informal peer debriefing	'reviewing notes from past visits'; 'talk and play method'; 'phones replace coloring books'; 'coffee with the WCPD officer'

Note. Themes were constructed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) within a narrative inquiry framework. Codes are illustrative excerpts and not exhaustive.

Challenges Encountered by Social Workers

Complexities in Building Rapport

Across all ten interviews, rapport emerged not as a brief warm-up phase but as sustained relational work spanning several sessions. SW1 framed it as recursive: *"It takes several sessions over weeks before the child will speak about what happened."* SW4 went further, describing two or three home or school visits before any disclosure work was attempted. For these practitioners, a child's early silence was not an obstacle to be cleared but a cue to slow down. Building safety came before seeking an account, and disclosure was treated as a process unfolding across visits rather than as an event to be secured in a single sitting.

Emotional Barriers to Disclosure

Children's emotional states could interrupt or derail the interview. SW2 read crying not as failure but as part of the work: *"The interview cannot be done in one sitting. The emotions are too strong, so what the children do is cry."* SW4 observed a wider range, with some children breaking down, others suddenly withdrawing, and others becoming angry and refusing to continue. SW10 added that some children fear not being believed, while others fear repercussions from the abuser. The participants treated these reactions as expected features of disclosure to be accommodated rather than managed away, and located their source in the child's circumstances rather than in any failure of technique.

Developmental Barriers to Disclosure

Working with very young children and children with cognitive disabilities surfaced an additional set of difficulties. SW4 named the limit encountered with the youngest survivors: *"The children aged 2 to 5, or those*

with mental disabilities, do not have the words." SW6 recalled a young girl who could say only that she heard the community bell ring when it happened, but not where or when. The child had anchored the event to a sensory cue meaningful in her own world that did not translate into the dates and places the case process required, and the practitioners were left to bridge that distance with whatever verbal means were at hand.

Family and Community Interference and Stigma

Family dynamics and community attitudes were repeatedly named as harder to manage than the children's own reticence. SW2 identified two recurring configurations: *"Sometimes the family answers for the child; sometimes the family refuses that the child be interviewed at all."* In communities bound by extended kinship and a strong sense of family honor, as expressed in the local notion of ba-in, disclosure was treated as a matter for the family rather than the individual child, and the question of who was authorized to speak for the child was itself contested. SW8 added that in small municipalities, confidentiality is difficult to maintain: *"The child is afraid to talk because classmates and neighbors will find out."* Where residents are at once neighbors, kin, churchgoers, and market vendors, the promise of confidentiality had little practical traction.

Environmental and Systemic Constraints

Physical settings and resource constraints generated barriers of their own. SW1 described how the interview environment can frighten the children it is meant to protect: *"Children sometimes refuse to enter the police station because they are frightened by the uniformed personnel."* The shortage extended to interview tools, leaving practitioners reliant on verbal questioning at exactly the point where a child's verbal capacity was already the limiting factor. SW8 named the most consequential gap: *"With no uniform set of questions, sometimes I end up asking leading questions, which can affect admissibility in court."* In the absence of a shared protocol and basic aids, the evidentiary quality of an interview rested on the individual practitioner's discretion.

Secondary and Vicarious Traumatic Stress with Burnout

Repeated exposure to children's accounts of abuse exacted clear psychological costs. SW7 described the pattern most fully: *"Some days I cannot stop thinking about what I heard; sometimes I dream about the cases. After difficult interviews, I feel drained, and worry about the next child."* Two participants spoke of a gradual erosion of their confidence in adults' protective intentions, and one of becoming more guarded in her own parenting. Set against these costs was the absence of any institutional response: none of the participants reported access to clinical supervision, structured debriefing, or any confidential mental-health benefit. Whatever processing they managed, they arranged for themselves.

Strategies Social Workers Employ to Address Challenges

Gradual Rapport Building and Child-Centered Adaptation

The participants described approaches to rapport that went well beyond the brief introductory scripting of basic interview training. SW1 used a deliberate strategy of continuity, reviewing notes from previous meetings before each home visit and using small details the child had shared as openings for the next conversation. SW2 described an adaptation that emerged in the field: she and her WCPD partner let child participants play with their phones, having found that children settle more readily with familiar online activities than with traditional coloring tasks. Both practices were worked out on a case-by-case basis rather than drawn from any manual.

Flexible Communication, Improvised Aids, and Boundary Management

Without standardized aids, the participants improvised. SW1 described how, with no anatomical dolls available, she and her WCPD partner used printed diagrams or invited the child to point, draw, or use her own words. SW10 described a developmentally calibrated bundle: simple, concrete language; body diagrams or picture cards; extra processing time; and avoidance of complex or abstract questions. SW3 set out a working rule for family pressure: *"Only one trusted adult can stay, and only if the child asks. If the family is insistent, I pause the interview and address it outside the room."* Moving disagreement out of the interview room kept the disclosure space intact while still acknowledging the family's standing.

Informal Peer Debriefing and Personal Coping

Without institutionalized debriefing, the participants relied on improvised peer and personal resources. SW1 described the most common pattern: she and her WCPD officer would talk over coffee, and she tried not to handle too many high-intensity cases in a row. SW7 named a different resource: "I pray to God for strength." These supports were real but fragile, resting on a single trusted colleague or on the practitioner's own faith and initiative rather than on anything the system provided.

DISCUSSION

Taken together and read through the four conceptual lenses outlined earlier, the findings point to a coherent pattern: practitioner adaptation is currently absorbing the cost of structural deficits located at the exosystem and macrosystem levels of the Philippine child protection system. The discussion is organized around the three gaps set out in the introduction. The first subsection addresses the implementation and adaptation gaps together, asking what frontline practice looks like when none of the assumed infrastructure is present and how practitioners adapt; the subsection on ecological compounding addresses the cultural and contextual gap specific to a rural indigenous setting; and the subsections on traumatic stress and on governance return to the implementation gap from the side of the workforce and the system that employs it. At each point, the question is not what the findings restate but what they add: how each gap is filled and what is distinctive in the answer.

Practice Wisdom Aligned with Trauma-Informed Standards

The participants have developed a sophisticated, implicitly trauma-informed practice without formal training in any structured framework, and it is here that the study speaks most directly to the gap concerning the day-to-day interpretive work of frontline practitioners. Their safety-before-disclosure sequencing treats a child's early silence as a freeze response to be waited out rather than pushed through, consistent with the trauma-informed principle that safety precedes story (SAMHSA, 2014) and with the disclosure-as-process literature that has displaced earlier event-based models (Alaggia et al., 2019; Hershkowitz et al., 2014; Malloy et al., 2013). Their reading of crying as part of disclosure rather than as a failure aligns with evidence that emotional support during interviews yields more complete accounts (Hershkowitz et al., 2007), and with their recognition of children breaking down, withdrawing, or turning angry maps onto the fight-flight-freeze schema (van der Kolk, 2014).

With the youngest children and those with disabilities, their reliance on concrete language, extra time, and picture-supported recall tracks what the developmental and practice literatures recommend when autobiographical memory for time and place is still immature (American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children [APSAC], 2023; Brown et al., 2017; Saywitz et al., 2017), and their continuity work and field-grown use of children's own digital devices echo recommendations to signal genuine interest in the child's wider life and to meet children in familiar media (Dianiska et al., 2024; Faller, 2015). Their improvised diagrams and pointing tasks are not equivalent to validated anatomical aids, but they expand the available modalities and ease the burden on verbal recall (Johnson et al., 2024). That this convergence has emerged from accumulated case experience rather than formal exposure is the study's first distinctive contribution: it identifies a workforce already well positioned to adopt structured protocols.

The convergence is uneven, however. Without a uniform set of questions, leading and suggestive questions were sometimes asked, with consequences for admissibility, and practice wisdom cannot reliably substitute for the externally validated questioning sequences that protocols such as the NICHHD Investigative Interview Protocol have been shown to deliver (Lamb et al., 2007). Any protocol adoption in Mountain Province should therefore codify and extend what the participants already do well rather than impose an imported template.

Ecological Compounding in a Rural Indigenous Setting

If the participants' practice wisdom is the encouraging side of the picture, the family, community, and environmental themes are the more difficult ones, and it is here that the study addresses the cultural and

contextual gap. Reading these through [Bronfenbrenner's \(1979\)](#) framework clarifies why the difficulties described are not a rural variant of the urban Philippine experience but a qualitatively distinct configuration. Substitutive speech and gatekeeping by guardians are documented internationally ([Alaggia et al., 2019](#)).

However, in Cordilleran communities, they are amplified by extended kinship structures and by the cultural emphasis on family honor, as captured in *ba-in*. The mesosystem density of Cordilleran social life, in which residents occupy multiple overlapping social roles simultaneously, renders abstract confidentiality difficult to operationalize, consistent with [Easton's \(2013\)](#) finding. The wider review literature catalogues fear, shame, and the fear of not being believed largely as individual or familial barriers to disclosure ([Lemaigre et al., 2017](#)); the present findings locate those same barriers in a specific mesosystem geometry, in which the overlapping roles of rural Cordilleran life convert ordinary social density into a structural obstacle to confidentiality.

This is the study's second distinctive contribution: it specifies how indigenous kinship and honor norms intersect with material scarcity to shape disclosure in ways a generic rural reading would miss. At the exosystem and macrosystem levels, the continued reliance on police-station interviewing and the absence of dedicated child-friendly rooms represent resource decisions whose costs are borne at the level of the individual interview, falling short of international standards ([APSAC, 2023](#); [Newlin et al., 2015](#)). The ecological reading identifies the level at which intervention must be located: practitioner training alone cannot resolve microsystem problems whose origins lie several systemic layers above.

Secondary and Vicarious Traumatic Stress as an Untreated Occupational Hazard

The structural picture extends to the practitioners themselves, and here the study returns to the implementation gap on the workforce side. Their accounts of intrusive cognition, sleep disturbance, emotional exhaustion, and reduced empathic capacity map directly onto the diagnostic features of secondary traumatic stress ([Bride, 2007](#); [Figley, 1995](#); [Kim et al., 2025](#); [Sprang et al., 2011](#)). Slower shifts in worldview and trust map onto [Pearlman and Saakvitne's \(1995\)](#) concept of vicarious trauma. The notable feature of the present dataset is the complete absence of any institutional response.

None of the participants reported access to formal supervision, structured debriefing, or any confidential mental-health benefit. The supports they fell back on, informal peer conversation and prayer, carry documented but limited protective value: peer debriefing buffers secondary traumatic stress only weakly when it rests on a single colleague ([Bride et al., 2007](#)), and religious practice, a well-attested coping resource among Filipinos in high-distress work ([Del Castillo & Alino, 2020](#)), is best read not as a substitute for organizational support but as what remains when such support is absent. That these are the only resources available is the study's third distinctive contribution: it documents secondary traumatic stress as an untreated occupational hazard in a setting where no institutional remedy yet exists. Within the organizational resilience framework, this corresponds to a near-complete absence of meso- and macro-level scaffolding ([Mansfield et al., 2016](#); [McFadden et al., 2015](#)). The international evidence on mandatory clinical supervision, structured group debriefing, and confidential mental health support provides an ample foundation for a locally appropriate response ([Kim et al., 2025](#); [Lev et al., 2022](#)).

Governance, Funding, and Workforce Conditions

These structural and workforce conditions, in turn, reflect the governance arrangements within which they sit. The Philippine child protection system operates within a decentralized governance model under the Local Government Code of 1991, with operational responsibility for first response, case management, and victim support devolved to local government units ([Roche, 2017](#); [Roche & Flynn, 2021](#)). The quality of services available to a child depends heavily on the fiscal capacity and administrative priorities of the local government unit in which she lives. [Roche's \(2017\)](#) systematic review concluded that current Philippine frameworks may be insufficient or insufficiently aligned with what children and families experience on the ground. In peripheral provinces such as Mountain Province, municipal social workers are expected to deliver services of equivalent standard to those in better-resourced urban centers, with a fraction of the infrastructure, staffing, and supervisory support. Heavy caseloads, limited continuing professional development, and the absence of a clinical supervision tradition ([Beddoe et al., 2014](#); [McFadden et al., 2015](#); [Roche & Flynn, 2021](#)) compound

the trauma burden documented above. Improving disclosure-stage interviewing in Mountain Province is therefore not principally a training problem but a governance and resource-allocation problem; practitioner-level interventions cannot resolve constraints whose origins lie in inter-governmental fiscal arrangements and workforce policy.

Practical Implications

If the structural reading above is accepted, four practical implications follow, each tied to a specific finding and each intended to build on what the participants already do rather than replace it. First, accounts of children refusing to enter police stations point to the need for a dedicated child-friendly interview space in every MSWDO, separate from police facilities and equipped to a basic standard consistent with international standards (APSAC, 2023; Newlin et al., 2015). Second, rather than importing a protocol wholesale, a locally adapted disclosure-stage interviewing protocol should be co-designed with the municipal social workers themselves, taking the NICHD protocol as a structural anchor while formalizing the practices the participants have already worked out: the multi-session pacing described by SW1 and SW4, the reading of distress as part of disclosure, the developmentally calibrated bundle described by SW10, and the boundary rule for family presence described by SW3. Third, the improvised diagrams and pointing tasks the participants fell back on indicate exactly what a basic kit of validated visual aids should contain: body diagrams, age-appropriate picture cards, and, given the field-grown use of children's own phones, age-appropriate digital interview tools. Fourth, the uniform absence of debriefing or supervision means that clinical supervision and structured debriefing should be institutionalized as an occupational health entitlement, with the cost treated as operational expenditure rather than discretionary spending. Each lies within the policy reach of the Provincial Government, in coordination with the regional Department of Social Welfare and Development office, and each is consistent with obligations assumed by the Philippines under Republic Acts 7610, 9344, 9775, and 11930, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Limitations

Several limitations bound the interpretation. The study is single-province in scope, and conceptual transferability rather than statistical generalizability is the appropriate scope claim. The sample of ten represents the full eligible population and sits within the range typically associated with conceptual sufficiency in qualitative work (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Only the social worker's perspective is captured; WCPD officers, prosecutors, parents, and child survivors themselves are not represented. Because the analysis rests on practitioners' self-reports rather than on observed interviews, it is open to the limits of recall and to social desirability bias: even with confidentiality assured, participants may have foregrounded practices they judged appropriate and understated lapses such as the use of leading questions. The frank disclosure of those very lapses by several participants offers some reassurance on this point, but the possibility cannot be ruled out. The cross-sectional design cannot speak to how practitioners' experiences and strategies evolve. Working with four interpretive lenses gave breadth at the cost of depth in any single lens. Future research should bring in multidisciplinary team perspectives, longitudinal designs, and, with appropriate ethical safeguards, the voices of child survivors and their families.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to understand what challenges municipal social workers in Mountain Province encounter when interviewing sexually abused children at the disclosure stage, and what strategies they have developed in the absence of standardized protocols and dedicated infrastructure. On the first question, the participants encounter six interrelated challenges spanning the child, family, community, and institutional levels, best understood as ecologically compounded rather than as discrete interpersonal difficulties: complexities in building rapport, emotional barriers, developmental barriers, family and community interference and stigma, environmental and systemic constraints, and secondary and vicarious traumatic stress with burnout. On the second, they have developed three locally grounded strategies: gradual rapport building and child-centered adaptation; flexible communication, improvised aids, and boundary management; and informal peer

debriefing complemented by personal coping. These strategies are substantially aligned with international trauma-informed practice despite the absence of formal exposure to those frameworks.

The analysis affirms the value of holding ecological, trauma-informed, secondary-trauma, and organizational-resilience lenses together for rural and indigenous child protection settings. It shows that the four operational gaps identified (dedicated interview spaces, a locally adapted protocol, validated aids, and institutionalized supervision and debriefing) are within the policy reach of provincial governance in coordination with national child protection agencies.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Ethical Approval

Ethical clearance was issued by the University of the Cordilleras Research Ethics Committee (UC-REC) with the notice to proceed dated 2 August 2025. Authorization to approach the municipal social workers was issued separately by the Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office. All participants gave written informed consent. A copy of the ethics clearance is attached as a [supplementary file](#).

Competing Interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. They are not deposited in a public repository because the sensitive subject matter and very small population of municipal social workers in the study setting would compromise participant anonymity.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Use

The author did not use generative artificial intelligence to produce the substantive content, the analysis, or the interpretation in this manuscript. Standard word-processing software was used for routine text editing only. All ideas, analysis, writing, and conclusions are the original work of the author.

REFERENCES

- Alaggia, R., Collin-Vezina, D., & Lateef, R. (2019). Facilitators and barriers to child sexual abuse (CSA) disclosures: A research update (2000-2016). *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 20(2), 260-283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838017697312>
- American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children. (2023). Practice guidelines: Forensic interviewing of children. <https://apsac.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/30014.pdf>
- Beddoe, L., Davys, A. M., & Adamson, C. (2014). 'Never trust anybody who says I don't need supervision': Practitioners' beliefs about social worker resilience. *Practice: Social Work in Action*, 26(2), 113-130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09503153.2014.896888>
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219-234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>
- Bowen, G. A. (2006). Grounded theory and sensitizing concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(3), 12-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500304>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 13(2), 201-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1704846>
- Bride, B. E. (2007). Prevalence of secondary traumatic stress among social workers. *Social Work*, 52(1), 63-70. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/52.1.63>
- Bride, B. E., Jones, J. L., & MacMaster, S. A. (2007). Correlates of secondary traumatic stress in child protective services workers.

- Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work, 4(3-4), 69-80. https://doi.org/10.1300/J394v04n03_05
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Brown, D., Lewis, C., Stephens, E., & Lamb, M. (2017). Interviewers' approaches to questioning vulnerable child witnesses: The influences of developmental level versus intellectual disability status. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 22(2), 332-349. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lcrp.12104>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Council for the Welfare of Children, Child Protection Network Foundation, University of the Philippines Manila, & UNICEF Philippines. (2016). *National baseline study on violence against children: Philippines*. <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/reports/national-baseline-study-violence-against-children-philippines>
- Del Castillo, F., & Alino, M. A. (2020). Religious coping of selected Filipino Catholic youth. *Religions*, 11(9), 462. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11090462>
- Dela Rosa, M. T. C., Lopez, S. R., & Manapol, M. L. (2023). Experiences of female adolescents on online sexual abuse and exploitation of children during community quarantine in Davao City, Philippines. *ASEAN Social Work Journal*, 11(1), 74-91. <https://doi.org/10.58671/aswj.v11i1.46>
- Dianiska, R. E., Quas, J. A., & Lyon, T. D. (2024). Using rapport building to improve information yield when interviewing adolescents: A systematic review and call for research. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 154, Article 106898. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.106898>
- Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 54-63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>
- Easton, S. D. (2013). Disclosure of child sexual abuse among adult male survivors. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 41(4), 344-355. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-012-0420-3>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Faller, K. C. (2015). Forty years of forensic interviewing of children suspected of sexual abuse, 1974-2014: Historical benchmarks. *Social Sciences*, 4(1), 34-65. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci4010034>
- Figley, C. R. (Ed.). (1995). *Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized*. Brunner/Mazel.
- Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: The opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 209-230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410200200205>
- Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292, 114523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., & Katz, C. (2014). Allegation rates in forensic child abuse investigations: Comparing the revised and standard NICHD protocols. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 20(3), 336-344. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037391>
- Hershkowitz, I., Lanes, O., & Lamb, M. E. (2007). Exploring the disclosure of child sexual abuse with alleged victims and their parents. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31(2), 111-123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2006.09.004>
- Johnson, M. S., Hyvik, M. S., Brathen, I., Magnussen, S., Melinder, A., & Klemfuss, J. Z. (2024). The use and productivity of visual aids as retrieval support in police interviews of preschool-aged victims of abuse. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 39, 289-302. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-023-09627-w>
- Kim, J. (2016). *Understanding narrative inquiry: The crafting and analysis of stories as research*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802861>
- Kim, J., Choi, M., & Pierce, B. (2025). Organizational justice and secondary traumatic stress among child welfare workers: The moderated mediation model. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 17(4), 922-929. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001632>
- Lafadchan, C. K., Rosario, W., Tafaleng-Ullalim, P. A., Bawiyan, V., & Cruz, F. (2022). Rape profile in Mountain Province. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(4), 7050-7060. <https://journalppw.com/index.php/jpsp/article/view/1289>
- Lamb, M. E., Orbach, Y., Hershkowitz, I., Esplin, P. W., & Horowitz, D. (2007). Structured forensic interview protocols improve the quality and informativeness of investigative interviews with children: A review of research using the NICHD Investigative Interview Protocol. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31(11-12), 1201-1231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2007.03.021>
- Lemaigre, C., Taylor, E. P., & Gittoes, C. (2017). Barriers and facilitators to disclosing sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence: A systematic review. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 70, 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.05.009>
- Lev, S., Zychlinski, E., & Kagan, M. (2022). Secondary traumatic stress among social workers: The contribution of resilience, social support, and exposure to violence and ethical conflicts. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 13(4), 833-852. <https://doi.org/10.1086/714015>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Malloy, L. C., Brubacher, S. P., & Lamb, M. E. (2013). "Because she's one who listens": Children discuss disclosure recipients in forensic interviews. *Child Maltreatment*, 18(4), 245-251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559513497250>
- Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies: Guided by information power. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1753-1760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444>
- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Broadley, T., & Weatherby-Fell, N. (2016). Building resilience in teacher education: An evidenced informed framework. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 54, 77-87. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.11.016>

- Mathews, B., Pacella, R., Scott, J. G., Finkelhor, D., Meinck, F., Higgins, D. J., Erskine, H. E., Thomas, H. J., Lawrence, D., Haslam, D. M., Malacova, E., & Dunne, M. P. (2023). The prevalence of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from a national survey. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 218(6 Suppl), S13-S18. <https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.51873>
- McDonald, N., Schoenebeck, S., & Forte, A. (2019). Reliability and inter-rater reliability in qualitative research: Norms and guidelines for CSCW and HCI practice. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 3(CSCW), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3359174>
- McFadden, P., Campbell, A., & Taylor, B. (2015). Resilience and burnout in child protection social work: Individual and organisational themes from a systematic literature review. *British Journal of Social Work*, 45(5), 1546-1563. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bct210>
- Newlin, C., Steele, L. C., Chamberlin, A., Anderson, J., Kenniston, J., Russell, A., Stewart, H., & Vaughn, C. (2015). Child forensic interviewing: Best practices. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice. <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/pubs/248749.pdf>
- Pearlman, L. A., & Saakvitne, K. W. (1995). Trauma and the therapist: Countertransference and vicarious traumatization in psychotherapy with incest survivors. W. W. Norton.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. State University of New York Press.
- Provincial Council on Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Violence Against Women and Children. (2024). Annual reports on child sexual abuse cases, 2023-2024 [Unpublished raw data]. Provincial Government of Mountain Province.
- Ramiro, L. S., Madrid, B. J., & Brown, D. W. (2010). Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and health-risk behaviors among adults in a developing country setting. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 34(11), 842-855. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2010.02.012>
- Roche, S. (2017). Child protection and maltreatment in the Philippines: A systematic review of the literature. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 4(1), 104-128. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.167>
- Roche, S., & Flynn, C. (2021). Local child protection in the Philippines: A case study of actors, processes and key risks for children. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 8(3), 367-383. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.332>
- Saywitz, K. J., Lyon, T. D., & Goodman, G. S. (2017). When interviewing children: A review and update. In J. B. Klika & J. R. Conte (Eds.), *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment* (4th ed., pp. 310-329). SAGE. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2893157
- Sonio, M. P., Fabella, F. E. T. (2023). The lived experiences of social workers handling child sexual abuse cases. *Cognizance Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3(6), 130-172. <https://doi.org/10.47760/cognizance.2023.v03i06.009>
- Sprang, G., Craig, C., & Clark, J. J. (2011). Secondary traumatic stress and burnout in child welfare workers: A comparative analysis of occupational distress across helping professions. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 37(3), 233-242. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/224845524_Secondary_Traumatic_Stress_and_Burnout_in_Child_Welfare_Workers_A_Comparative_Analysis_of_Occupational_Distress_Across_Professional_Groups
- Squires, A. (2009). Methodological challenges in cross-language qualitative research: A research review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 46(2), 277-287. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnurstu.2008.08.006>
- Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 44(1), 26-28. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1320570.pdf>
- Stoltenborgh, M., van IJendoorn, M. H., Euser, E. M., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J. (2011). A global perspective on child sexual abuse: Meta-analysis of prevalence around the world. *Child Maltreatment*, 16(2), 79-101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559511403920>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach (HHS Publication No. SMA 14-4884). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-s-Concept-of-Trauma-and-Guidance-for-a-Trauma-Informed-Approach/SMA14-4884>
- Tumwesigye, K. (2021). Challenges and experiences faced by social workers working with children exposed to abuse and neglect. *Open Science Journal*, 5(4). <https://osjournal.org/ojs/index.php/OSJ/article/view/2692>
- United Nations. (1989). Convention on the rights of the child. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 44/25. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>
- van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.
- van Nes, F., Abma, T., Jonsson, H., & Deeg, D. (2010). Language differences in qualitative research: Is meaning lost in translation? *European Journal of Ageing*, 7(4), 313-316. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-010-0168-y>

How to cite this article:

Tafaleng-Ullalim, P. A. (2026). Frontline realities: Social workers' experiences in interviewing sexually abused children in Mountain Province, Philippines. *Recoletos Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 14(2), 25–38. <https://doi.org/10.32871/rmrj2614.02.03>