An Exploratory Study on the Challenges Encountered and Strategies Employed by the Philippine Child Caring Agencies Amidst COVID-19: Social Work Administration in the New Normal

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Abstract
This paper presents the experiences of Child Caring Agencies (CCAs) in the Philippines that offer free residential care services for Children in Need of Special Protection (CNSP) amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It discusses the challenges encountered and strategies employed in managing and operating the residential care facilities for children. The results show implications on the conduct of social work administration and the delivery of social welfare and services in residential settings.*.*

Keywords: *Children-in-care, Child Caring Agencies, Pandemic, Child Welfare, Social Work Administration, Orphanages, Residential Care*

Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic is a universal crisis, and its impact on the well-being of individuals, especially children, is predicted by experts to be lifelong (UNICEF, 2021). Some children lost their parents and caregivers to the virus, while others battled it. We witnessed how children continue to be affected physically, psychosocially, emotionally, and cognitively and risks are even greater for children in care or children in Child Caring Agencies (CCAs).

In the Philippines, a Child Caring Agency (CCA) is a type of residential care facility for children offered by both government and non-government organizations. CCAs mainly cater to Children-in-Need-of-Special-Protection (CNSP), e.g., victims of physical and sexual abuse, abandoned, neglect, surrendered, etc. The programs and services of these agencies range from 24-hour protective custody with provision of basic needs such as food, education, psychological support, medical services, case management, child placement, legal assistance to temporary shelter. These agencies are licensed and accredited by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Part of the requirements to operate a CCA is to have a Licensed Social Worker to manage the children's cases primarily. Thus, many of these agencies' top management personnel are social work graduates and social work licensure exam passers.

The proliferation of CCAs in the Philippines dates back to the Spanish colonial period. Today, the DSWD maintains 46 facilities across the different regions of the country. It also licensed and accredited 197 CCAs managed by faith-based and non-government organizations (NGOs). While government-run

facilities depend on government funds, those managed by NGOs and faith-based organizations depends greatly on local and international funding (Department of Social Welfare and Development, 2021).

At present, many CCAs have proactively faced the effects of the pandemic since the onset of COVID-19 in our country, especially since they are catering to a variety of stakeholders, including children-clients, their clients' families, their personnel, partners, and the community where their agency belongs. To say '*proactively*' means that the CCAs have been crafting and following guidelines and protocols related to how they go about and do their usual tasks around COVID-19. CCAs have been exploring and utilizing ways how to help children under their care survive through the pandemic. They have been fighting the challenges brought about by restrictions and economic disruptions. They have been doing their best to protect the children under their care even if it means that they have to accept the "new normal" regardless of their preparedness, willingness and capacity to adapt. This amount of work the CCAs have been doing is all related to Social Work Administration. In other words, it would be interesting to find out how CCAs plan/ re-plan and implement their programs and fulfill their vision and mission amidst the pandemic.

Methodology

This research aims to reveal what CCAs have been doing to stay true to their commitment to serve and protect the children under their care despite the challenges brought by the pandemic. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges that the child-caring agencies (CCAs) encountered in managing their residential care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the different strategies and innovations employed by the CCAs to respond to these challenges?

Documenting the CCAs' experiences amidst the COVID-19 pandemic will aid in enhancing programs and services and crafting new protocols, policies, and procedures for managing CCAs' residential care facilities during disasters and emergencies. Likewise, the results can enrich CCAs' disaster risk and reduction management framework. It will give a new perspective to social work practice in child welfare administration in the post-pandemic era.

This study is descriptive and exploratory. The purposive sampling method was used in the selection of participants. CCAs in Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao, and National Capital Region (NCR) were contacted and written to. 15 CCAs responded and became participants in the in-depth interviews conducted via Zoom and Google Meet. Participants' responses were then grouped and organized in themes for the data analysis.

Review of Related Literature

Social Work Administration

As early as 1950, Social work administration was already defined by Kidneigh as "*a two-way process of 1.) transforming policies into concrete social services and 2.) the use of experience in recommending modification of policy*". According to Skidmore (1996), social work administration is "*recognized as a vital component in the delivery of social services.*" It involves *all staff members at all levels in either leadership or team ship roles.*" Although several authors have attempted to define administration, Stein believes "*that one of the most acceptable concepts describe administration as the process of defining and attaining the objective of an organization through a system of coordinated and cooperative effort*" (Skidmore, 1996).

Administering and managing an agency is based on a systematic framework first coined by Luther Gulick and Lyndall Urwick in 1937 for the Brownlow Committee. This framework used for efficiently executing business processes in a company (or any organization) comprises seven (7) steps. These are as follows:
   A. Planning
   B. Organizing
   C. Staffing
   D. Directing
   E. Coordinating

F. Reporting
G. Budgeting

These steps in administration, also known as POSDCoRB, are still being used in social welfare organizations.

Status of CNSP and the Child Caring Agencies in the Philippines

In 2006, child poverty in the Philippines is highest in Zamboanga Peninsula which is at 50.8%, CARAGA which is at 51.3%, Bicol which is at 55.5%, MIMAROPA (Region IVB) at 50.2% Central Luzon (Region III) which is at 20.7%, CALABARZON (Region IV-A) which is at 19.1%, and National Capital Region (NCR) which is at 8.1%. When looking at the Philippine map, these areas are found in Luzon and Mindanao, north and south of the country (National Statistics Coordination Board, 2006: Council for the Welfare of Children 2nd NPAC Full Report, 2016).

The 2nd National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC) released by the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC) in 2006 mentioned that regions in which the poverty incidence is highest lack opportunities for productive employment and suffer from long and unceasing conflicts and peace and order, which in turn, burden the Filipino children. According to the report, Luzon, is beset with problems of children who need special protection. Moreover, children victims of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation are among the problems encountered by the highly urbanized and high-performing NCR (Council for the Welfare of Children 2nd NPAC Full Report, 2016).

In monitoring the Children in Need of Special Protection (CNSP), the CWC and its partner stakeholders believe that the fusion and collective efforts of the following sectors is necessary. This is how the CWC, in illustration, envisioned a Child-Friendly Philippines*:
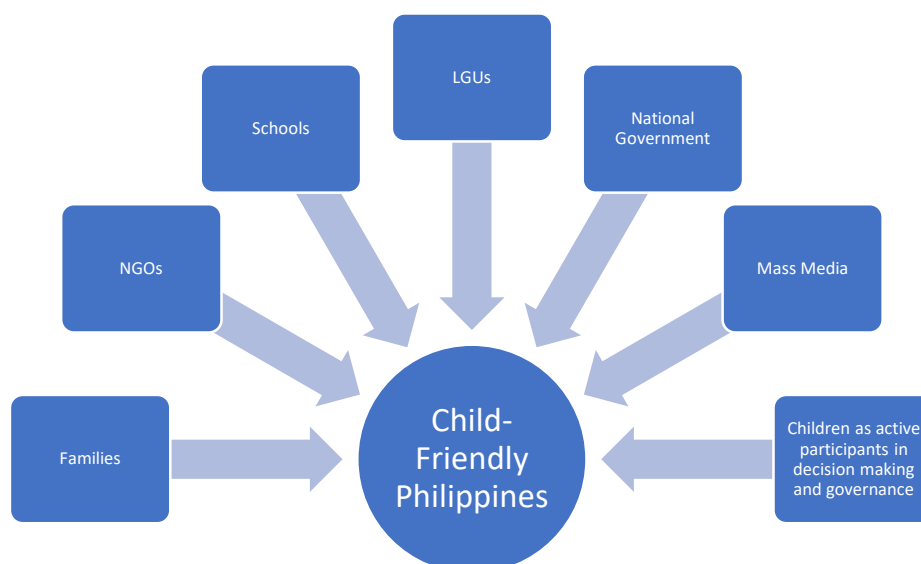
*Illustration is by the authors but the content is discussed on page 120 of the 2nd NPAC Full Report, 2011-2016 under the heading "VI. Advocacy and Resource Mobilization for Children"

CWC-Philippines emphasized that the national government, mainly the DSWD, is tasked to promptly enact comprehensive and proactive policies on children and ensure the budget and funds allocation. As mentioned in the introduction, it is the DSWD that licenses and accredits CCAs. In addition, the DSWD also provides residential services for children below seven years old who are victims of abuse, abandonment, and neglect through its 28 residential care centers for children and 15 residential facilities for the youth across the country (State of the Filipino Children Report of CWC, 2010). However, to supplement and complement DSWD's efforts, there came the NGOs (faith-based and non-secular), across the country, whose purpose is the provision of preventive and rehabilitative services. These include provision of immediate intervention for children's early recovery and reintegration to their families. These private CCAs, as mentioned earlier, depend on international and local fund sources but are recognized, licensed, and accredited by the DSWD.

Aside from the CCAs run by the national government and private entities (e.g. non-sectarian, faith-based among others), looking at the illustration above, there is also the Local Government. In the Philippines, there are CCAs that are owned and being run by the Local Government Units (LGUs). The Philippines has the so-called law entitled "The 1991 Local Government Code". This law clearly delineates responsibilities for national to local expenditure and revenue generation. The Code devolved all basic social services to the LGUs except for basic education (State of the Filipino Children Report of CWC, 2010). Geographically, these LGUs are found in the different regions of the Philippines –Region I, II, III, IVA (CALABARZON), IVB (MIMAROPA), V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, CARAGA, ARMM (Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao), CAR (Cordillera Administrative Region), and NCR.

Table 1: Philippines' Regional Administrative Divisions According to Island Group

Island Groups*	Regional Administrative Divisions**
Luzon	Regions I, II, III, IVA (CALABARZON), IVB (MIMAROPA), V, CAR, and NCR
Visayas	Regions VI, VII, and VIII
Mindanao	Regions IX, X, XI, XII, CARAGA and ARMM,

*The Philippines is divided into three island groups: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. These are divided into 17 regions, 81 provinces, 144 cities, 1,490 municipalities and 42,028 barangays according to the National Statistical Coordination Board, December 31, 2013

**Region is a sub-national administrative unit comprising of several provinces having more or less homogenous characteristics, such as ethnic origin of inhabitants, dialect spoken, agricultural produce, etc. A region has several provinces while a province consists of municipalities and cities. A city or municipality consists a number of barangays.

The main source of revenue of LGUs is the internal revenue allotment (IRA) which is allocated based on internal revenue collections from income taxes, value-added tax (VAT), excise tax, taxes on capital gains and other taxes. LGUs also generate their own revenues and receives transfers from external sources, both foreign and domestic. Other sources of funds come from special programs and projects externally funded but requires a certain percentage of cost sharing or counterpart funding from the LGU under agreed conditions written in legal instruments such as a Memorandum of Agreement (State of the Filipino Children Report of CWC, 2010). These three sources of funds are where LGU-run CCAs get their money.

Given the information above, this means that the CCA personnel vary in terms of which institution compensates them. There are Social Workers and CCA staff hired by the national government or DSWD. There are hired by the LGUs and there are also employed by private NGOs. Moreover, this means that the guidelines being followed in terms of managing social welfare organizations, such as CCAs, may be national and local in scope and context. CCAs that are privately owned and ran may follow a set of guidelines that they crafted individually and autonomously, but because they would like to be licensed and accredited by the national government, they need to follow DSWD-issued guidelines as well.

Managing Residential Care Facilities for Children during COVID-19 Pandemic

During this pandemic social work administrators' capacities as organization leaders were put to the test as they battled the effects of the pandemic on their respective fields. For instance, in southeast Asia, in the field of child welfare, orphanage administrators faced the challenges of financial constraints, the threat of contracting the virus, and case management disruptions. In Thailand, donations made by tourists to Wat Bot Woradit orphanage have been affected due to the closing of the borders. Because of this, the orphanage was forced to send back some of the children under their care to their families without proper case management (Lowe, 2020), which is a very risky decision, considering that most of the children's families could hardly feed themselves. In the same report by Lowe, last May 2020, experts predicted that hundreds of orphanages in Cambodia faced possible closure due to financial constraints as donations ran out.

The COVID-19 pandemic also put a lot of pressure on managing children's cases which were brought about by the strict implementation of COVID-19 protocols. In the Philippines, the court ordered the postponement of children's court hearings last March 2020 due to the Enhance Community Quarantine (ECQ) (Abad, 2020). On the other hand, PREDA Foundation Philippines had asked the court to immediately release the children to their parents due to some abuses in government-managed facilities

aggravated by COVID-19. The problem with such recommendations is that children are given back to their parents in haste without proper process, which could lead to the child ending up again in an ineffective non-rehabilitative system for CICLs (Abad, 2020).

The threat of the virus was one of the most challenging in managing these residential facilities. For instance, Hospicio de San Jose, the oldest child-caring facility in the Philippines, was hit twice by the virus last April and August of 2021, wherein a significant number of staff and children tested positive for the virus. Due to this, the administration called for donations as the whole facility was quarantined (Cinco, 2021; Depasupil, 2021). On the other hand, the director of Rahmawati orphanage in Subaraya, East Java, Indonesia, struggled to admit the increasing number of orphaned children who lost their parents to the COVID-19 virus. The director worried about their financial situation as donations were scarce (Lucanus, 2021).

In the Philippines, during the pandemic, these residential care facilities for children did their best to manage and operate their facilities guided only by the country's COVID-19 protocol. It was only on May 27, 2020, three months after when the first COVID-positive case was officially announced in the Philippines, when the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) guidelines for "All Social Welfare and Development Agencies (SWADAs) Operating Center-Based (Residential) Facility" was made available. The advisory was issued as guidance for the daily management of the residential facilities.

Theoretical Framework

Organizations exist to promote the best interest of their client systems in the same way that CCAs exist to protect vulnerable children. The organization, as a social system, is composed of intersecting components that are part of larger systems - the community at large and society. This posits that when COVID-19 hits the world (larger system), organizations, such as the CCAs, continue to be affected in terms of people, tools, and resources that are supposed to be brought together to achieve predetermined objectives through institutionalized strategies. However, with the pandemic, even the strategies that have been in place for years were challenged or disposed of. With the framework that an organization is a social system, this research is informed by one contemporary organizational theory, evidence-based management. Evidence-Based Management Theory tells us there is no one correct approach to structuring organizations (Birkenmaier et al., 2014). Organizational aspects such as agency size, mission, clients, and staff qualifications are essential when structuring the CCAs and developing a management style. CCAs vary in size, nature, resources, and so on. This is why it is more important to document how CCAs are faring during an unexpected global health crisis. The management strategies employed during the pandemic are based on their respective organizational characteristics.

Another guiding framework used in the analysis is the Strengths Perspective. Since COVID-19 is the newest challenge to CCAs today, we shall use the strengths perspective to identify the organizations' possibilities, assets, and resources as they face problems. The strengths perspective emphasizes people and organizations' fundamental dignity and resilience in overcoming challenges (Birkenmaier, 2014). One of the six principles of strengths perspective most applicable in this study is that "struggle may be injurious, but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity" (Saleeby, 2012: Birkenmaier et al., 2014). COVID-19 may be "injurious," but there are accounts from the CCAs that participated in this study that the pandemic, particularly the lockdowns, gave them opportunities to innovate, learn new strategies and practice reliance on their capacities to survive and surpass overwhelming obstacles.

Results

Profile of Participants

The research covered 15 CCAs – three from NCR (National Capital Region), six from Luzon, three from the Visayas, and three from Mindanao. The oldest CCA was established in 1974, while the youngest operation was established in 2014. All CCAs are non-government organizations. Out of 15, four are secular/faith-based organizations. All CCAs are residential care facilities (RCF), and six CCAs offer community-based programs apart from the homelife program. The RCF with the highest number of clients has 130, while the CCA/RCF with the smallest number of clients has ten children. All CCAs rely on both international and local donors and funders, except for two CCAs that only rely on local

donations. We grouped the CCAs according to agency size (Please refer to Table 2). An agency with less than 50 children is considered small. An agency with 51 - 99 clients is medium, while an agency with more than 100 is large. Out of 15 CCAs, 12 agencies are small-sized, one agency is considered medium, and two are large-sized agencies.

Table 2. Respondents' Profile

	N1	N2	N3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9	V10	V11	V12	M13	M14	M15
Island Cluster	NCR	NCR	NCR	Luzon	Luzon	Luzon	Luzon	Luzon	Luzon	Visayas	Visayas	Visayas	Mindanao	Mindanao	Mindanao
No. of Years in Service	34	22	30	48	24	30	8	12	32	52	33	25	37	20	16
Nature of Agency	Faith-based NGO	Non-sectarian NGO	Non-sectarian NGO	Non-sectarian NGO	Faith-based NGO	Secular NGO	Non-sectarian NGO	Faith-based NGO	Non-sectarian NGO	Non-sectarian NGO	Non-sectarian NGO	Non-sectarian NGO	Non-sectarian NGO	Secular NGO	Faith-Based NGO
Agency Size Category	Small	Small	Large	Small	Small	Small	Small	Small	Small	Large	Small	Medium	Small	Small	Small
No. of Staff	33	20+	107	44	11	13	36	12	17	19	between 10-20	55	8	9	10
No. of Clients	60	54	52	53	10	39	33	24	13	124	around 20	79	10	12	21
Case Category	Residential	Abused Girls and CICL	Abuse; Children with Special Needs	Orphaned and abused infants; abused girls	Residential/Homelife	short-term programs for children and adults with special needs	Recovery Unit and Residential Home	Abandoned, Neglected, Surrendered, Orphaned; Residential and for Adoption	Family Home (Residential); Boys are from Manila Boystown	Residential	Victims of Trafficking	Rehabilitation and Aftercare	abused; children on streets	Residential	orphaned, abandoned, neglected
Fund Source	International and Local	International and Local	International and Local	International and Local	International	Local	International and Local	International and Local	International	International and Local	International and Local	International and Local	Local	International and Local	International

The table above shows that the study involved 15 CCAs from the four major locations or regional clusters in the Philippines:

1. National Capital Region (NCR) – Agencies N1, N2, N3
2. Luzon – Agencies L4, L5, L6, L7, L8, L9
3. Visayas – Agencies V10, V11, V12,
4. Mindanao – Agencies M13, M14, M15

The years in service, work nature, agency size, number of staff, number of clients, case categories present, and fund source of the 15 child-caring agencies are also shown in the table.

CCAs and COVID-19

Six out of 14 CCAs experienced having personnel who were infected with the virus. The CCAs vary in terms of vaccination status among staff because the data gathering was conducted when vaccines were starting to be rolled out, mainly in different cities of NCR since it is considered the ground zero of COVID-19 in the Philippines.

Summary of Findings

The findings on challenges in the management of CCAs, strategies, and innovations employed by CCAs in social work administration shall be presented according to the seven (7) administration processes (and framework) pioneered by Luther Gulick and Lyndall Urwick in 1937. The steps are i. Planning; ii. Organizing; iii. Staffing; iv. Directing; v. Coordinating; vi. Reporting and vii. Budgeting. These steps in administration are also known as POSDCoRB. Below are the findings.

On Planning and Directing

The first challenge related to Planning and Directing, identified by the CCAs, is the difficulty of meeting face to face to discuss the operation of their facility due to the implementation of COVID-19 protocols that forbid face-to-face meetings. Even then, the study shows that only one small agency in Luzon had suspended its board meeting during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The rest of the agencies strategize to continue their online or face-to-face board meetings. It is interesting to note that one agency in NCR feels the need to meet monthly instead of quarterly. Regardless of agency size, all 15 CCAs can work around planning, organizing, and directing in both face-to-face and in-person modes, with virtual means as most frequently used because it is more convenient, especially during the strictest

form of government-imposed lockdown, which is called Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) in the Philippines.

The second challenge under Planning and Directing is the admission of new clients and visitors, such as donors and volunteers, which may put the agencies in danger of exposure to the virus. As a strategy, seven agencies chose not to admit new clients, especially during the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) period. Four of these agencies are considered small agencies and are located in Luzon. Small agencies have limited physical space, thus the difficulty in accepting new clients as it means allocating space for an isolation room. On the other hand, the five agencies that opted to continue admission had subjected their clients to a strict admission process, including COVID-19 swab tests, 14-day isolation, etc. These five agencies are composed of two small, two medium, and one large agency. The medium-sized agencies, as observed, were the ones who continuously admitted clients but with strict COVID-19 protocol compliance.

An example is a medium-sized agency (L4) located in Luzon. This CCA shared that there were times that they had to accept new clients because the local government unit/ city where the clients are from lacked an appropriate shelter where they could stay. The new clients, teenage girls, were dropped in the agency, so the agency took the responsibility of administering the COVID-19 test on the girls. This medium-sized agency has a Nipa hut intended for new clients where they could stay at first as well as guests and partners, which they built near the main gate, and an isolation room for new clients which is located in the main building. This CCA attested that admission is not only meticulous but also expensive. During that time, the COVID-19 RT-PCR test cost 3,000-6,000 in Philippine peso (US$60 - 120).

The third challenge related to Planning and Directing is when the CCAs need to secure their clients and staff from being infected with COVID-19. All CCAs did not allow visitors to have closer contact with the children-in-care. For the other six agencies that accepted visitors (donors, client's family members, partner agency representatives, etc.), they only allowed them in a designated area away from the children's dorm, i.e., outdoor, center garden/farm, receiving area, where they can welcome visitors but made sure that the visitors strictly observed protocols such as wearing of face shields, face masks and at least two-meter distance between persons in the center. One CCA shared that it stopped allowing visitors long before the Philippine government announced the national lockdown in March because this CCA heard and learned from the experience of neighboring Asian countries. Regardless of agency size, all 15 CCAs discouraged visitors to protect children from acquiring the disease.

On Organizing

All 15 CCAs offer a homelife program because all 15 are basically residential care facilities (RCFs). Pre-pandemic, they used to dedicate Saturdays for out-of-the-Center activities such as out-of-town trips, internships, etc. However, when the lockdown was implemented, the Social Workers and other Center staff needed to rethink the outdoor activities and replace them with highly stimulating activities that could be conducted indoors. In other words, the tasks of the Center staff went through "re-defining and re-classifying," which are known as "organizing/re-organizing."

On Staffing

The data gathered revealed that CCAs faced the pressure of ensuring that their staff reports on duty with a minimal to zero possibility of having been exposed to the COVID-19 virus for them not to infect the clients. The objective, to safeguard clients and staff from infectious disease, brings the CCAs to define what work needs to be done and who to do which work. As a strategy, most (eight) CCAs, regardless of their size and location, have chosen to require their staff to stay longer in the facility. This entails convincing the staff by giving additional benefits such as free board and lodging, shuttle services, internet load allowance, and free RT PCR test, among others. The aim of letting the staff stay longer in the facility and transporting them back and forth to their dorm is to create a safety 'bubble' to reduce the possible exposure of both clients and staff to the COVID-19 virus. All participating CCA staff willingly abided by the new rules. One CCA (L4) shared that they adopted a two-week staff duty rotation. Agency L4 has 44 staff. 22 staff would go on duty for two straight weeks, not going home at all. When they completed their duty, the other batch composed of 22 would replace them for two weeks. As a standard procedure, they should have negative COVID-19 antigen test results before proceeding to their duty. In short, the staff undergoes COVID-19 testing every two weeks. Because most staff saw the need to

sacrifice their time with their respective families, health and safety, they attest that their mental health suffered. Agency L4's Executive Director shared that all staff under her supervision needed psychological first aid and debriefing. The staff were overwhelmed by the seemingly uncontrollable increase of COVID-19 cases in both their city of residence and the city where their workplace is located. The staff are burdened with administrative tasks, case management, and the role of ensuring the welfare, health, and safety of their children-clients whilst thinking about what their families eat and do back at home amidst unemployment, hunger, infections, and immobility made worse by the sudden and erratic imposition of lockdowns.

Also, some CCAs attested that their staff has been doing several roles, contrary to what they were originally hired for. For instance, one CCA has an in-house teacher. Its Executive Director said that sometimes, to relieve the houseparent from the strenuous task of looking after the children when they do chores, the teacher would volunteer to do this house parenting role. The staff knows the delineation of their tasks. Still, they asserted that they could take on the role of another staff, especially when the latter gets sick, because they believe that helping each other means staying true to their mandate especially during a global pandemic, where no one could be individualistic.

CCAs were also understanding of their staff needs, thus, free internet access was made available to the staff. This was to promote and maintain the communication between the staff and their families while the staff could not leave the CCAs. Aside from this, the CCAs also ensure the psychological and mental health of their staff by providing one or more of the following: self-care training/sessions, mindfulness exercises, allotted time for prayers and devotion, especially for those faith-based agencies, special financial assistance, longer days-off, and additional leave credits that the staff can use especially if there are emergencies. Moreover, according to three respondents, the support of their executive directors, as well as the family life structure of the agency, helped them feel at ease as they treated each other as families. The fear of being infected by the COVID-19 virus and being away from their families are two factors that affected the CCA staff the most.

On Coordination

The respondents lamented what looks like the temporary disconnection of their partnerships with other agencies, especially that of the Local Government Units (LGU). Two of the respondents strongly pointed out the difficulty of coordinating with the LGU during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. For them, this was a result of the additional workload given to the LGU social workers specifically to help distribute the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) of the government carried during the height of COVID-19 outbreaks in the country. A strategy employed by one agency was to be assertive to the LGU about their coordination, especially on the reintegration of a client into the community, where the LGU social worker is expected to conduct a Parental Capability Assessment Report (PCAR) and monitoring once the client is reintegrated. Some agencies conducted their coordination online such as scheduling a meeting, sending requests thru emails, attending virtual court hearings, maintaining social distancing when in the partner community, and designating an area away from the children's dorm in the Center when accepting visits from partner agencies. However, in processing the children's documents (e.g., birth and foundling certificates, tri-media certificates, etc.), respondents most experienced difficulty. On the other hand, in coordination with children's families, the respondents only have a problem with families who live in remote areas with no internet access or, worse, no telephone for contact.

On Reporting

The result of the study reveals that reporting to the higher management by the staff did not pose much of a challenge to the CCA as only a few agencies shared about it. According to them, staff reporting and monitoring were done through virtual meetings. For two agencies, the protocol of reporting shows that the staff reports to the Executive director and the latter to the Board of Directors (BOD). One agency came up with the idea of a monitoring sheet that will track the staff's outputs rather than time spent in the agency. The results also show that decision-making and policy formation comes from the board of directors of these CCAs. The middle management (in this case, the executive director, the manager, the supervisor, or the senior social workers) were the ones who revised, developed, recommended to the board, and implemented policies. The result also indicated that the respondents of this study did not receive any guidelines on managing RCFs/CCAs during COVID-19, that is, ideally the role of the national government to release. What guided them was only the national Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) guidelines for COVID-19 response.

When dealing with reporting, we cannot do away with effective performance management. The CCAs' staff started to do things differently but still tried to aim for the same objectives, especially since COVID-19 came in March 2020, three months after strategic plans were implemented. By saying "doing things differently", we mean that the CCAs executed their plans but with social distancing, with a reduced budget, batch by batch because people more than ten cannot stay together, thus, increasing the number of sessions per activity. The CCA staff believe that they were able to perform effectively and that they went beyond what's expected of them despite the learning curve brought about by doing things virtually.

On Budgeting

The study reveals that this is one of the most challenging areas in managing a residential care facility for children during a pandemic, as 11 CCAs depend on both international and local donations, three (3) CCAs rely on international alone, and one (1) CCA depend on local donations alone. These donations were affected as funders became few or were only giving a few donations this time. One agency in NCR shared that international donors stopped sending donations. Likewise, an agency in Mindanao, although having stable International funding at present, was uncertain if the funders would still support for the next cycle. However, most of the agencies said that donations are still coming but that it is not as much prior to the pandemic. CCAs have crafted new funder's guidelines during the pandemic, including how they can continue giving donations, especially in-kind donations while strictly adhering to the COVID-19 protocols.

Interestingly, nine (9) respondents shared that they have received assistance from their Local Government Units (LGU) and barangays *(barangay is the smallest unit of public governance in a Filipino city or town)*. This assistance came in the form of the persons with disabilities (PWD) card, school supplies for the children, uniforms, box of goods, vaccination, disinfectant, rice, sardines, or whatever was distributed to the community by the LGUs. One agency even shared that their *Sangguniang Kabataan* (Council of Youth) has also given them vegetables. However, four (4) agencies claimed that they had not received any form of assistance from their LGU or the DSWD. One agency said that their Municipal Social Welfare Office gives support by facilitating their cases and escorting their social workers to cross borders during the ECQ period.

Furthermore, seven (7) respondents shared that their CCAs have chosen to realign their year 2020 budgets to cover the unforeseen expenses brought by the pandemic, such as additional medical supplies, masks, oximeters, and thermometer, among others. In addition, there are increases in food expenses, utility bills, and transportation expenses due to the extended stay of the staff and children in the facility. Online classes that created the need to buy computers, tablets, or laptops for children's use and constant virtual meetings that resulted in higher electricity consumption also contributed to the expenses. The respondents shared that the budget not utilized due to the pandemic, such as the budget for children's field trips and other activities, was also realigned to cover some of the expenses brought about by the pandemic. Moreover, five (5) respondents shared that their agencies implemented cost-cutting measures to ensure that their agencies' budgets would suffice for the year.

One agency makes sure that they only spend on necessary things as part of their strategy to tighten their belts financially. One large agency in NCR had closed two of its facilities. Although closing the facilities was part of the agency plan prior to the pandemic, it had been expedited when pandemic protocols were implemented. It is also interesting to note that there was no staff retrenchment. Some agencies even hired additional personnel such as teachers and medical staff.

Discussion

The experience of CCAs during the COVID-19 pandemic is presented in two main points here - (1) challenges that they faced and (2) strategies and innovations that they employed to respond to the challenges. The CCA, as a social system, undergoes a transactional process between the systems within it and the systems outside of it (environment). Using this framework, the researchers view the challenges, strategies, innovations, and lessons as ones that make up the 'transactional processes' that an agency experiences amidst COVID-19.

It is seen from the presentation of findings that one challenge that CCAs encountered is maintaining the stability and functioning of the Board. During the pandemic, the role of the Board is seen as significant as the role of the middle management and rank-and-file staff because a lot of short and long-term organizational decisions need to be made, especially with a global crisis around. It is

discussed above that regardless of the agency size, all CCAs pushed through with the Board meetings. The commitment and passion of the CCAs towards their mandate which is to promote the best interest of children is reflective of their efforts in maintaining regular and special board meetings amidst the threat of the COVID-19 virus. These efforts show that the decision-making, and instructions are intact, which is very important in the overall operation of the CCAs. It is important that the board is functional, especially during disasters and emergencies. The result of the study also shows that the CCAs have the willingness and capacity to adjust their policies to cater to the needs of their staff and clients during the pandemic. Because policy and program changes are inevitable, especially during a global health crisis, the agency must be swift, resilient, adaptive, and open to planning and re-planning. Planning in social work administration may come in different types, and these are as follows (Skidmore, 1995):

    a.   *Substantive planning calls for the formulation of broad issues confronting the program*
    b.   *Procedural planning reflects concern for day-to-day details*
    c.   *Program planning is the preparation for program activity, and purposeful activity to achieve goals must be preceded by adequate planning.*
    d.   *Agency planning should involve all agency personnel closely affected by plans developed and should be integrated with all phases of the agency administration.*

Like for the challenges related to admission of new clients and limited non-acceptance of visitors in the Centers, such realities and processes would definitely undergo a particular type of (re)planning to respond to possibilities such as when the referring agency needs to transfer the client because they can no longer accommodate the latter, when the client's life is in danger that he/ she needs to be placed/transferred in the appropriate shelter as soon as possible, when half of the staff has the virus, when almost everyone in the Center is experiencing mental health issues, when the Center is used to doing everything in person and not in remote mode and the list goes on.

With the presence of COVID-19, the researchers believe that the abovementioned types of planning are being executed by social welfare agencies globally. COVID-19 has been with us for two years and we do not know when this would be eliminated from our lives, hence, the planning process by organizations nowadays would absolutely be dynamic, continuous and evolving.

With regards to Organizing, the results show that CCAs, regardless of their size and years of existence, went through the experience of re-defining and re-organizing the tasks and processes within them. As mentioned above, since outdoor activities were discouraged, the CCAs had to rethink these and adopt stimulating and effective activities that could be done indoors. Organizing refers to *"formally classifying, defining and synchronizing the various sub-processes or subdivisions of the work to be done"* (Skidmore, 1995). It also refers to determining the delineation of tasks among programs available at the social work agencies. With COVID-19 at hand, some organizations are forced to reclassify and/or redefine even their purpose, extent, coverage, depth, and process. The rules on admitting new clients, the limitations and restrictions being experienced by referring and receiving agencies as well as non-accommodation of guests are also examples of tasks that are being re-defined during the pandemic.

On Staffing, since CCAs have been implementing staff duty rotations, assigning alternating workers to work on and off depending on their agreed schedules keeping in mind that there should remain a skeletal workforce, despite the existence of mental health issues among staff and clients alike, it can be claimed that the people are the assets and resources in which organizations draw power from. As Dennis Saleeby (2012) (Birkenmaier, et al., 2014) said, one of the principles of strengths perspective is *"Assume that you do not know the upper limit of the capacity to grow and change, and take individual, group, and community aspirations seriously."* (Birkenmaier, et al., 2014). This principle is very much apparent in the characteristics of CCA staff during this pandemic. We did not know how much they were capable of doing until COVID-19 pandemic came into our lives. Their commitment, service, and passion for the vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized children were tested, and this is shown when the respondents shared that the staff was willing to leave their families to stay with the children-in-care 24/7 for long periods. The CCAs were basically functioning and staying true to their thrusts because of the staff who willingly sacrificed their personal lives, health, and safety, even though it would mean going through COVID-19 tests every two weeks.

On Coordination, since this administration process means *"orchestrating and interlinking the various components of the work"* (Skidmore, 1995), the researchers claim that social welfare agencies have long mastered the task of various interlinking components of work, even pre-pandemic. But with COVID-19 in our lives, it is interesting to see how "*working from home - an unprecedented and ongoing*

phenomenon, experienced by millions (or billions) of workers, facilitated by the rise of connectivity and communication technologies (Endresen, 2020) takes place in social welfare agencies, especially the CCAs. According to Kevin Kniffin and 28 other researchers in their paper "COVID-19 and the Workplace: Implications, Issues, and Insights for Future Research and Action", virtual teams were already growing in number and importance before the pandemic but now, many workers participate in different remote teams, via synchronous and asynchronous digital communication (Endresen, 2020)*.* Bulk of CCAs' work is coordinating with national and nongovernmental organizations. CCAs with child adoption programs deal with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the local social welfare and development offices (LSWDOs) in the child's city of birth and residence, and the biological and adoptive families, and partner agencies. This alone means day-to-day coordination work, and usually, this work is multiplied by the number of children being catered to in the CCA. The ratio between the Social Workers and children matters here as well. As mentioned above, the Evidence-based Management Theory claims that the best management style is contingent on the particular characteristics and capacities of the agency. This explains why the 15 CCAs vary in how easy or difficult coordination with partners was, especially during the ECQ period. As presented in the results, the CCAs do not only differ in terms of information technology (IT) resources in order for them to cope up with their responsibilities. They also differ in terms of how IT-equipped their partner LGUs and clients' families were.

On Reporting, the results show that the CCAs do both reporting and monitoring with the use of online methods. According to Skidmore (1995), Reporting "*involves regularly updating the superior about the progress or the work-related activities. The information dissemination can be through records or inspection*". The results show that the pandemic made the CCAs realize that they can monitor their staff's performance by checking on their outputs rather than the time they spend online. Quality over quantity has become the mantra of most CCAs during the pandemic. Additionally, the results show that the Center staff embraced the fact that their targets are the same, only that they have to do things differently. This indicates that the staff gives importance to effective performance and excellence despite the global health crisis.

On Budgeting, the results show that most budget plans of the CCAs were crafted and finalized without the pandemic in mind. When COVID-19 came to the Philippines in March 2020, the CCAs had to realign the purpose of their existing budget, initially intended for outdoor activities, out-of-town trips, and perhaps even abroad, to make the budget allotments usable. In this case, flexibility, adaptability, and resilience are the characteristics that are present in the 15 participating CCAs. According to Dennis Saleeby, we cannot talk about the strengths perspective without touching on the resilience concept. Ensuring the availability of a budget is vital to any CCAs. In this study, the respondents clearly understand this as they put more effort into securing that they have a budget to utilize for activities through the pandemic.

Lastly, as seen in the seven processes of social work administration discussed above, the internet plays a significant role in terms of managing a residential care facility during the COVID-19 pandemic. From planning to budgeting, the use of virtual platforms takes center stage. CCAs may vary in size, location, and availability of funds that are definitely affected during the pandemic. Still, the challenges become manageable, especially when the CCAs are open and willing to utilize and maximize information technology (IT).

Conclusion
        In ensuring the delivery of social services and the protection of children-in-care, the study, through the testimonies of 15 CCAs, proves that social work administration is a vital component. Without proper POSDCoRB (Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, and Budgeting), agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic may be unable to carry out their responsibilities. CCAs attest that the seven-step social work administration process is doable regardless of agency size, agency location, length of existence and functioning, availability of funds, and amount of resources as long as the CCAs tap their innate strengths, capacities, and assets within, which undeniably are the staff whose commitment and passion in working with the vulnerable, marginalized and oppressed children went beyond the upper limits of their capacity to grow and change. To emphasize, the study reveals that the size of the agency and its location do not matter in fulfilling the CCAs' administrative and management functions during the pandemic. What matters is the strengths of the people that run the agency. Even though there were no national government-imposed guidelines on managing

residential care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the agencies continued to survive and function because they relied on their willpower, resources, resilience, and capacity to adapt as their commitment to carry out their thrusts as child caring institutions.

This study also affirms the literature and previous related studies that show how CCAs, regardless of size and fund source, struggle with finances during the pandemic. The study also confirms that the mental health of staff and clients was one of the most affected, thus, given equally significant attention, since the strengths of the CCAs mainly come from the performance, commitment, and selflessness of staff and that it is from their innate strengths that CCAs continue to thrive and to innovate strategies that are responsive to their client's needs in the new normal.

Moreover, since the effects and impact of COVID-19 came to the CCAs in varying degrees and periods, the study shows that there is no one approach in responding to challenges brought by the pandemic. As backed up by evidence-based management, there may be no one uniform strategy that helped CCAs carry on during this global health crisis, but CCAs can learn from each other's experiences when they document their individual realities, highlighting the challenges in social work administration, how they responded to these and ultimately, how they fared through the early stages of the pandemic up to the present.

Lastly, the experience of 15 child-caring agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic teaches us, Social Workers, that social work administration, as a component in the delivery of social services and social welfare, is highly indispensable. It is through social work administration that an organization translates its vision, commitment, passion, and plans into concrete activities. Since we established that any social welfare organization is a social system that continuously experiences changes that come in the form of challenges and innovations, the steps and processes an agency goes through are the same prior to and even during a global pandemic. The steps that an agency executes, which involve planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting (POSDCoRB), are still expected and should continue to be invested in, only that the execution becomes different now that there are limitations and restrictions caused by this 'new normal'. Hence, POSDCoRB is a framework and a process that is highly applicable and relevant to social welfare organizations at present, only that it demands a higher level and improved set of practice skills, know-how in information technology, and values from social work practitioners around the world for agencies to continue to function, deliver and appropriately respond to client needs amidst the pandemic.

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Glennie Marie M. Sina-on is a Registered Social Worker and an Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Work at the University of the Philippines, Diliman Campus. Before joining the faculty in 2016, she used to do direct social work practice in the private and public sectors. She has worked with children in a child sponsorship organization as well as with departing Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) in a national government agency that caters to migrant Filipino workers. She has also done supervisory work in the country's biggest social protection program which is known as the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (or 4Ps), Philippines' conditional cash transfer (CCT) program. She became a Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Fellow in 2018. She was a Cheung Kong Endeavour Australia Scholarship awardee in 2010, which gave her the opportunity to do her undergraduate Social Work Field Education at the University of South Australia. She holds a Master in Family Life and Child Development which she also took at the University of the Philippines.

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