
THE FACE OF CHILD LABOR IN THE PHILIPPINES: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF LAWS AND POLICIES

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Abstract

Child labor undermines human capital, leading to a decline in labor productivity that ultimately impacts a country's economy. This study reviewed the existing statutory and regulatory laws and policies of child labor in the Philippines using qualitative content analysis. The paper highlighted the compliance with child labor in the Philippine government with the child labor framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly in terms of (a) statutes enacted, (b) policies and programs implemented, and (c) rate of child labor incidents in the country. The result shows that although laws were created shortly after the ratification of the CRC, the delay in implementing corresponding policies and programs contributed to an increasing child labor incident. However, once policies and programs were in place, the incidence of child labor declined. This indicates that addressing child labor is critically dependent on the timing and responsiveness of policy interventions. The study confirms that the Philippine government is committed to eradicating child labor and has complied with the provisions of the CRC. Academe should also be actively involved in disseminating information regarding child labor practices and in developing policies that are more research-based and adaptable to emerging challenges.

Keywords: *child labor, rights of the child, qualitative content analysis, Philippines*

Introduction

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted on November 20, 1989, and subsequently ratified by the members of the United Nations. The child, as a human being, is entitled to all rights and freedom as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights. In recognition of the rights of the child, they should be provided with a safe and caring environment that allows for the maximum development of their personality. This would prepare them to become responsible individuals, making them assets of the nation (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

Further, the CRC stresses that a child should be free from economic exploitation and that member states should create interventions or measures protecting the rights of the child. Recent global research has indicated that child labor remains a persistent challenge. Habib et al. (2024), found that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified child labor in all countries worldwide as a result of economic shocks, school closures, and otherwise weak social protections. Similarly, foreign direct investment flows and informal labor markets have been found to have continued effects on children's participation in labor in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America by Kechagia & Metaxas (2023). Likewise, Camilletti (2025) asserted that child work continues to be universal in low and middle-income countries, both in terms of economically active and unpaid care work responsibilities. Supporting this evidence, Kozhaya (2025) reported that targeted bans against child labor significantly affect school attendance by emphasizing where such bans are enforced. All these findings put together show that child labor is not just a Philippine issue but a global concern that should be addressed with coordinated and timely policy responses.

In the Philippines, statutory laws and regulations were crafted in response to CRC. However, incidents of economic exploitation among children were reported (Villamil, 2002). In particular, several children were seen working in small-scale gold mining (Lu, 2012). This situation calls for an inquiry as to whether the Philippines is indeed compliant with the CRC despite the laws and regulations that have been created. Based on the literature, when children work at a very early age, they become less productive, thereby slowing the economic growth of the country (Orbeta et al., 2002).

This paper has explored and reviewed the existing laws and regulations that protect the rights of the child in the Philippines. It showed how the Philippine government was exhausting all its efforts to eradicate exploitation, especially on child labor. The paper answered the following review questions: (1) What are the legislative enactments of the Philippines that regulate and mandate child labor?(2) What are the policies and programs initiated and implemented on child labor?, and (3) what is the rate of child labor incidents in the Philippines after CRC was ratified?

Methodology

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine the actions taken by the Philippine government against child labor by systematically examining laws, policies, and programs. Specifically, the study analyzed RA No. 7610, RA No. 7658, and RA No. 9231 as the primary statutes prohibiting child labor. The policies included Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking Resolution No. 008, DOLE D.O. No. 216, DOLE Labor Advisory No. 24-A, and DOLE Labor Advisory No. 22. Moreover, major national framework such as Philippine Development Plan (2017-2022), The Philippine Plan of Action to End Violence against Children (PPAEVAC), Philippine National Strategic Framework for Plan Development for Children, 2000 – 2025 or “Child 21”, and Philippine Program Against Child Labor Strategic Framework were incorporated. The reports on child labor incidents from 1988 to 2000 and 2019 to 2022 were also analyzed.

A systematic process of coding has been undertaken-in which themes and categories have been inductively derived from the documents. Inter-coder comparisons and peer debriefs improved coding reliability in addition to that credibility was further deepened through trustworthiness checks such as triangulation of multiple data sources and an audit trail of analytic decisions. Importantly, the reviewed documents and data had been obtained from open-access and official repositories, including government websites, international organizations, and published reports online, ensuring both transparency and credibility of findings in the process.

Results and Discussions

Table 1. Statutes enacted by the Philippine Government

Law No.	Title of the Statute	Year
RA No. 7610	Special Protection of Children Against Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act	1992
RA No. 7658	An Act Prohibiting the Employment of Children Below 15 Years of Age in Public and Private Undertakes, Amending for this Purpose Section 12, Article VIII of Republic Act No. 7610	1992
RA No. 9231	An Act Providing For The Elimination Of The Worst Forms Of Child Labor And Affording Stronger Protection For The Working Child	2003

As shown in Table 1, the Philippine government has enacted two laws protecting the child from any form of exploitation two years after the ratification of CRC. The first law was RA No. 7610,

which mandates the protection of the whole being of the child. While the second law, RA No. 7658, regulates child employment **below the age of 15**.

After over a decade, the legislators of the Philippine government have seen a need to strengthen the protection of the child by enacting RA No. 9231. This law amended RA No. 7610, which intensifies penalties for those individuals’ exploiting children in any form.

The gap between Institutional and political constraints exists because RA No. 9231 was approved in 2003, but its implementing guidelines, policies, and programs were not established until 2017. Limited policy formulation was hindered by weak government capacity, competing national priorities, and a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. Child labor cases continued to rise throughout the 1990s, when, despite various laws against child labor, such laws were never strictly enforced.

Table 2. Policies and programs on child labor

Policies	Descriptions	Year
Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking Resolution No. 008	This prohibits human trafficking, especially the child.	2017
Philippine Development Plan (2017-2022)	This highlights in helping Filipino families gain a more stable income, therefore, preventing children from working.	2017
The Philippine Plan of Action to End Violence against Children (PPAEVAC)	This guides establishments and institutions to create a safe environment free from any form of harm towards children.	2019
DOLE D.O. No. 216	This prohibits illegal recruitment, human trafficking, and child labor in all establishments in the Philippines.	2020
DOLE Labor Advisory No. 24-A	This outlines in the regulation of allowing children as part of the entertainment industry.	2020
Philippine National Strategic Framework for Plan Development for Children, 2000 – 2025 or “Child 21”	This serves as a guide to formulate policies concerning the safety of the children as well as policies that help them grow productively.	2020
DOLE Labor Advisory No. 22	This reinforces the regulation of allowing a child to participate in public entertainment highlighting parental supervision.	2021
Philippine Program Against Child Labor Strategic Framework	This program helps all sectors to minimize the incidents of child labor.	2023

In Table 2, there are eight administrative policies and programs that the Philippine government is implementing.

It can be noted that the administrative policy concerning child labor by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) was crafted in 2017. This shows that there was a 14-year gap after RA No. 9231 was passed into law. The gap suggests that establishments in the Philippines might commit child labor, as policies concerning child labor have not yet been in place.

Though there was an over a decade gap, the Philippine government has steadily campaigned against child labor from 2017 up to 2023, as shown in Table 2. This is a strong manifestation of the Philippine government to eradicate child labor and to respond to CRC.

Figure 1 shows the child labor in the Philippines from 1988 to 2000. It can be noted that there were around 2.1 million child labor incidents recorded from 1988 to 1991. After the ratification of CRC, there was only a 2.26% decrease in the child labor incident rate in the Philippines.

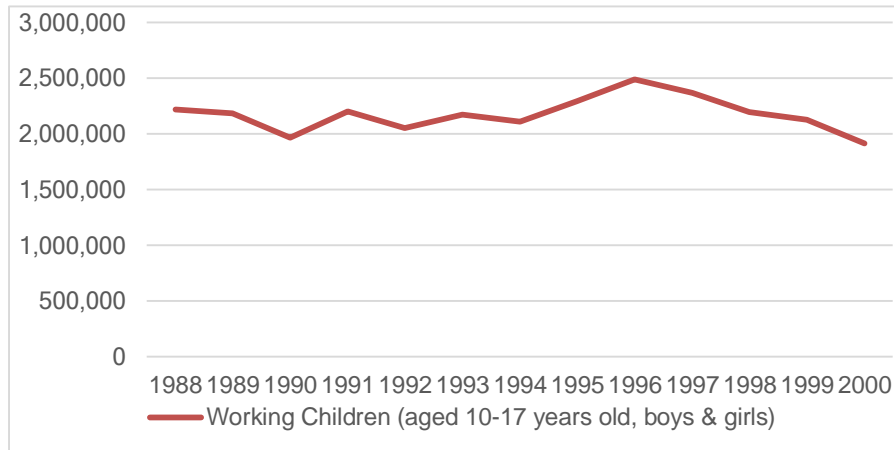


Figure 1. Rate of child labor in the Philippines from 1988 to 2000

Despite the enacted laws (RA No. 7610, RA No. 7658 and RA No. 9231) protecting the rights of the child and prohibiting child labor, the incidents of child labor continued to increase from 1993 to 1999. However, in 2000, the rate of child labor incidents declined by 9.99%.

It can be deduced that from 1993 to 2000, there was a lack of policies and programs relating to the regulation of child labor.

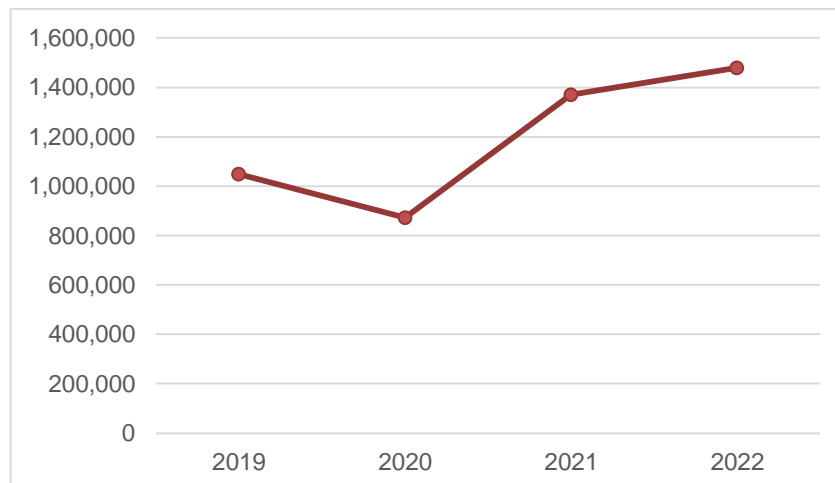


Figure 2. The rate of child labor in the Philippines from 2019 to 2022

Figure 2 shows the rate of child labor incidents from 2019 to 2022. Comparing the statistics of child labor incidents back in 2000, there was a decrease of 45.23%. This means that the Philippine government has been fighting child labor for the past 19 years. The decline in child labor incidents was even noted in 2020. As observed, from 2017 to 2020, there were several policies and programs being implemented to reduce child labor in the Philippines.

However, the child labor incidents began to increase by 36.35% in 2021. The inclined rate was added by 7.43% in 2022. There was one program crafted and implemented in 2021, but this was not fully actualized because of the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This shows that child labor was less arrested by the authority between 2021 and 2022 due to the pandemic. As reviewed, the most recent program was only initiated and implemented in 2023.

In comparison with its neighboring ASEAN countries such as Indonesia, child labor increased in the 1990s. Still, since the government implemented its National Action Plan on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2002), with aid from the ILO, there has been a steady decrease in child labor incidence Bimardhika, E., Witoelar, F. (2025). Likewise, Vietnam experienced a

substantial decline in child labor incidence after the adoption of the National Program on Child Labor (2016-2020), which combined strict enforcement with educational support (Dung & Khuyen, 2021; Timár et al., 2022). In contrast, Cambodia continues to have higher incidences of child labor because of weak institutional frameworks and high reliance on informal economies (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2021). These comparisons illustrate that while the Philippines has complied with CRC standards, delays in harmonizing policies with laws significantly constrained early progress as compared to some of their neighboring countries.

Findings

In the Philippines, laws were created right after the ratification of the CRC. However, policies and programs promulgated aligned with existing laws concerning child labor were crafted a decade after the laws were enacted. The slow response of policies and programs has increased the rate of child labor incidents in the country. It was also found that after policies and programs prohibiting child labor were in place, the rate of child labor began to decline.

Conclusion

The study found that creating measures and interventions protecting the rights of the child and prohibiting child labor practices can lead to a decrease in child labor incidents in the country. In the Philippine context, it can be deduced that the government has been serious in eliminating child labor. As statistics is concerned, from the year CRC was ratified, child labor incidents in the Philippines have started to decline. This proves that the Philippine government, to some extent, has been compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically regarding child labor.

Recommendations

It is recommended that academe should be involved in information dissemination about child labor practices. Also, a more responsive and relevant policy that is research-based should be made.

Limitation

This study only reviewed RA No. 7610, RA No. 7658, and RA No. 9231, Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking Resolution No. 008, DOLE D.O. No. 216, DOLE Labor Advisory No. 24-A, and DOLE Labor Advisory No. 22, Philippine Development Plan (2017-2022), The Philippine Plan of Action to End Violence against Children (PPAEVAC), Philippine National Strategic Framework for Plan Development for Children, 2000 – 2025 or “Child 21”, and Philippine Program Against Child Labor Strategic Framework. The data presented in the study was taken from the reports on child labor incidents from 1988 to 2000 (NSO & NEDA, 2002) and 2019 to 2022 (PSA, 2023).

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