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Extensiveness of Child Protection Clubs in Mitigating Child Abuse in Public Primary Schools in Ilala Municipality, Tanzania

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Abstract: *This study assessed the extent to which Child Protection Clubs (CPCs) mitigate child abuse in public primary schools in Ilala Municipality, Tanzania, guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. A convergent design under a mixed-methods approach was employed. The target population comprised 1,930 participants (1,766 teachers, 82 headteachers and 82 parents) from 82 public primary schools. Simple random sampling was used to select 240 teachers, while purposive sampling was used to select 12 headteachers and 12 parents, giving a sample of 264 respondents. Data were collected through questionnaires and interview guides. Instrument validity was established through expert review by three specialists from the Open University of Tanzania, and a pilot study was conducted in two schools outside the main sample. Reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, while trustworthiness of qualitative data was ensured through triangulation and peer debriefing. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages and means, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that teachers rated CPCs as effective to a high extent (grand mean = 3.53) in increasing pupils' awareness of abuse, encouraging reporting and promoting understanding of children's rights. However, interviews revealed persistent fear, stigma, weak follow-up of reported cases and uneven CPC functionality across schools. The study concluded that CPCs are a valuable school-based protection mechanism whose impact is constrained by implementation gaps. It recommends that school leaders strengthen supervision, teacher training, confidentiality and follow-up mechanisms, and collaborate with parents and communities to enhance CPC effectiveness.*

Keywords: *Extensiveness, Child Protection Clubs, Mitigating Child Abuse, Public Primary Schools*

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1. Introduction

Child protection within educational settings remains a fundamental pillar for ensuring safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. Schools are expected not only to deliver academic knowledge but also to safeguard learners from all forms of harm that may undermine their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. In this regard, child protection clubs have emerged as school-based interventions designed to empower learners with knowledge, reporting mechanisms, and peer support systems to identify, prevent, and respond to child abuse cases (UNESCO, 2020). These clubs play a critical role in promoting child rights awareness and strengthening school-community collaboration in safeguarding children.

Globally, violence against children remains a persistent challenge affecting millions of learners across different

contexts. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) reports that a substantial proportion of children experience physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, often within environments that are supposed to ensure their protection. Similarly, UNICEF (2023) highlights that schools, despite being protective spaces, still record cases of bullying, corporal punishment, and sexual exploitation. In response, many education systems have adopted school-based child protection strategies, including child protection clubs, peer education groups, and safeguarding committees, to mitigate abuse and promote early reporting mechanisms (Pinheiro, 2021).

In Africa, child abuse continues to be a major social and educational concern, with many cases remaining underreported due to cultural silence, fear, and weak reporting structures. Studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that children are frequently exposed to physical punishment, neglect, and sexual exploitation both at home and in school settings (Ariyo, 2021; Ifayomi et al., 2024). In response, several countries have introduced child protection initiatives within schools, including the establishment of school-based guidance and counselling programs, child safeguarding policies, reporting and referral mechanisms, life skills education, anti-violence school campaigns, and peer-led child protection clubs. However, their effectiveness is often constrained by limited resources, inadequate training, and weak enforcement mechanisms. Consequently, school-based child protection clubs are increasingly viewed as grassroots mechanisms for strengthening child safeguarding systems in education institutions (Fantaye et al., 2022).

In Tanzania, child abuse remains a pressing concern despite the existence of legal and policy frameworks such as the Child Protection Act and the Child Protection Policy (URT, 2016). Reports from the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC, 2023) indicate a rise in physical, emotional, and sexual abuse cases in primary schools, particularly in urban areas. In response, the government and development partners have encouraged schools to establish child protection structures, including child protection clubs, to enhance awareness, reporting, and prevention of abuse. These clubs are intended to provide safe platforms where learners can discuss protection issues, identify risks, and report cases of abuse without fear of stigma or retaliation (URT, 2022).

Despite these interventions, evidence indicates that child abuse remains prevalent in several regions of Tanzania, particularly in Dar es Salaam, where Ilala Municipality consistently records higher rates of abuse cases in public primary schools. Recent reports from the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC, 2023) show a worrying upward trend in child abuse incidents between 2021 and 2023. In Ilala, reported cases stood at 60% in 2021, slightly declined to 59% in 2022, and increased sharply to 71% in 2023 (URT, 2023). In comparison, other districts such as Temeke, Ubungo, and Kigamboni recorded relatively lower proportions of cases, although the problem remains persistent across all areas. This situation raises critical concerns regarding the effectiveness of existing school-based child protection mechanisms, particularly child protection clubs, in safeguarding learners. Despite their establishment in many schools, it remains unclear the extent to which these clubs actively contribute to the mitigation of child abuse and whether they are implemented effectively to achieve their intended protective objectives. Therefore, this study focuses on examining the extensiveness of child protection clubs in mitigating child abuse in public primary schools in Ilala Municipality, with the aim of generating empirical evidence on their effectiveness in promoting child safety and strengthening school-based protection systems.

Child abuse remains a persistent and escalating challenge in Tanzania, with serious psychological, emotional, and physical consequences for children's development and their overall well-being. Evidence from recent studies indicates that child abuse in public primary schools is increasing in Ilala Municipality, despite the presence of national policies and school-based safeguarding interventions (Magesa & Shekuwe, 2024; Nguma & Isango, 2022). This situation is further complicated by underreporting, largely driven by stigma, fear, limited awareness of reporting mechanisms, and unreliable data systems that obscure the true magnitude of the problem,

Reviewed studies by Simpson (2021) and Vedasto et al. (2023) reveal that, despite efforts to address cases of child abuse through newspapers, radio, television and social media, prevalence remains high as also indicated by a recent report from the Legal and Human Rights Centre which shows that child abuse is on the rise and remains one of the leading violations of human rights in Tanzania (LHRC, 2022). The report documented 350 and 370 cases of violence against children in 2022 and 2023 respectively, with 81% of them being sexual abuse, posing substantial challenges to children's safety and development within school and home environments. In response, schools have established child protection clubs as a key intervention to enhance prevention, reporting and awareness of abuse. However, none of the reviewed studies adequately addressed the extensiveness of child protection clubs in mitigating child abuse in public primary schools. If the problem is not properly addressed, children will continue to grow in unsafe environments and risk becoming vulnerable future community members, leaders and parents. It is in this regard that the current study investigated the extentiveness of child protection clubs in mitigating child abuse in public primary schools in Ilala Municipality, Tanzania.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Empirical Review

This section reviewed empirical literature on the extent Child Protection Mitigate Child Abuse in Primary Schools

This study examines how Child Protection Clubs in primary schools prevent child abuse by raising awareness, educating students on their rights, and promoting peer support. It examines the clubs' impact on fostering a safe school environment and improving communication about child protection issues.

Gubbels et al. (2021) conducted a study about Effective Components of School-Based Prevention Programs and clubs for Child Abuse: A Meta-Analytic Review. The study aimed to examine the overall effect of these school-based programs on (a) children's child abuse-related knowledge. A literature search yielded 34 studies (158 effect sizes; N = 11,798) examining knowledge of child abuse and 22 studies (99 effect sizes; N = 7804) examining self-protection skills. A significant overall effect was found of school-based programs on both knowledge ($d = 0.572$, 95% CI [0.408, 0.737], $p < 0.001$) and self-protection skills ($d = 0.528$, 95% CI [0.262, 0.794], $p < 0.001$). The study concluded that School-based prevention clubs show positive effects on children's child abuse-related knowledge, and program effectiveness can be improved by implementing specific components and techniques. However, the study includes a variety of programs, each with differing designs, delivery methods, and durations, which could introduce heterogeneity in the findings. While moderator analyses address some of this variation, the lack of standardization may still affect the generalizability of results. Therefore, the recent study focused on the contribution of child protection clubs to curbing child abuse in public primary schools to provide a generalization of the findings.

Lu et al. (2022) conducted a realist review of School-Based Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Prevention Programs, utilizing an iterative search of electronic databases, grey literature, and citation tracking to gather relevant studies. The review included quantitative evaluation studies focused on students aged 5–18 in primary and secondary schools, as well as other types of studies without population restrictions. Thematic content analysis was used to synthesize the data, revealing that effective school-based CSA prevention programs are characterized by tailoring content to the cognitive developmental stages of participants, repeated reinforcement of key concepts, interactive teaching methods, positive feedback, and employing a 'train-the-trainer' model. Though, the study includes evaluation studies, it primarily relies on thematic content analysis, which provides insufficient information on its ability to quantify long-term outcomes. A realist review approach could benefit from more quantitative evidence regarding the sustained impact of CSA prevention programs on children's knowledge retention and self-protective skills over time. Hence, the current employed a mixed method which allowed for triangulating data from both methods, the study cross-verify findings, increasing the study's validity and reducing the impact of biases associated with one method alone.

Degenaar et al. (2020) conducted a study about the Strategic Integrated Communication Framework for Child Protection Organizations in South Africa. The article aimed to determine how strategic integrated communication can be conceptualized and implemented to improve the communication approach and practices of child protection organizations. Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were conducted with four of the largest registered national child protection organizations in South Africa to determine the suitability and application of strategic integrated communication in the child protection organization context. The study found that Strategic integrated communication and child protection clubs improve the communication approach and practices of child protection organizations in South Africa. However, the study relies solely on qualitative methods, which gives insufficient information on the ability to quantify the impact of the proposed communication framework. Quantitative measures, such as surveys or assessments of communication effectiveness pre- and post-intervention, would provide stronger evidence for the framework's efficacy. Therefore, the current study focused on child protection clubs that adopt the principles of strategic integrated communication, such as consistent messaging and stakeholder engagement, to create a responsive network within primary schools. This could improve reporting of abuse and promote preventive measures and thus enhance a study finding and conclusion.

Musau et al. (2022) conducted a study about the Influence of the Child Protection Benchmark on Management Outcomes in Child-Friendly Schools of Makueni County, Kenya. The study employed a mixed-method triangulation design with a convergent model that inculcates regression and correlation models. The study findings establish that schools partially put in place and managed child protection clubs' measures as an important benchmark to strengthen management outcomes in CFS. The study concluded that schools partially implemented and managed child protection clubs' measures as an important benchmark to strengthen management outcomes in Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) of Makueni County, Kenya. Nevertheless, the study's findings are unsatisfactory and fully generalizable beyond the child-friendly school model in Makueni County. Since, the schools outside this model or in different regions face distinct challenges and resources for child protection, potentially impacting the applicability of these conclusions. Therefore, this study employed regression and thematic analysis models which added a quantitative basis to the study's conclusions, supporting evidence-based policymaking. Policymakers can use these results to advocate for more structured and measurable child protection initiatives,

enhancing management practices in child-friendly schools.

Eliakunda et al. (2022) conducted a study about the Evaluation of Strategies Adopted by Christian Social Service Commission Child Protection Project in Ensuring Violence Free Learning Environment in Targeted Primary Schools in Kibaha District, Tanzania. The study employed a convergent design under mixed research, whereby qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time and analyzed separately. The targeted population for the study included 4 schools, 4 head teachers,72 teachers,783 students, a project manager and 48 school committee members hence the total of 908 participants. The instruments for data collection were questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussions and document analysis guide. The reliability of quantitative instruments was established through Cronbach Alpha; (r = 0.608 for teachers' questionnaire and r = 0.653 for students' questionnaire) while the reliability for the qualitative data was established through triangulation of data. The study revealed that The CSSC child protection project employed training, group discussions, presentation, and formation of child protection clubs in targeted primary schools, but did not ensure sufficient participation of teachers, students, and community members. However, the study included teachers with insufficient participation of the key stakeholders which provided unsatisfactory findings and conclusions. Hence, this study included the key education stakeholders such as parents that provided a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and experiences regarding curbing child abuse.

2.2 Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on Ecological Systems Theory (EST) by Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979), which explains that a child's development and well-being are shaped by multiple interacting environmental systems. The theory is applied in examining the extentiveness of child protection clubs in mitigating child abuse among primary school children. EST posits that children exist within interconnected systems, including the microsystem (family and school), mesosystem (interaction between parents and teachers), exosystem (community structures and institutions influencing the child indirectly), and macrosystem (cultural values, norms, and national policies) (Powell, 2022; Honickman, 2023). Within this framework, child protection clubs are viewed as part of the school microsystem that strengthens safeguarding practices through peer support, awareness creation, and reporting mechanisms. The theory further highlights that the effectiveness of such clubs depends on the quality of interactions between schools, families, and the wider community in responding to child abuse cases.

The strength of Ecological Systems Theory lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the multiple layers of influence affecting child protection and development (Elliott & Davis, 2020). It enables the study to examine how school-based interventions such as child protection clubs interact with family involvement, community norms, and national child protection policies to prevent abuse. However, the theory is limited in that it places less emphasis on the direct role of structured interventions and institutional enforcement mechanisms in addressing child abuse (Mahaye & Ajani, 2023). Despite this limitation, EST remains highly relevant to this study as it provides a multi-layered framework for analyzing how child protection clubs function within and across different social systems. It supports the investigation of how coordinated efforts between schools, parents, and communities contribute to creating safer learning environments and reducing child abuse in public primary schools in Ilala Municipality.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study used a convergent parallel design within a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time, analyzed separately, and then compared to identify convergence or divergence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design allowed teachers' ratings of CPCs to be checked against the experiences of headteachers and parents, giving a fuller picture of the extent to which CPCs mitigate child abuse.

3.2 Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The target population was 1,930 people in 82 public primary schools in Ilala Municipality: 1,766 teachers, 82 headteachers and 82 parents (URT, 2024). The sample was 264 respondents (Table 1). Simple random sampling was used to select 12 schools. In each school, simple random sampling was used to select 20 teachers, giving 240 teachers, so that every teacher had an equal chance of selection. Purposive sampling was used to select the headteacher of each sampled school, because headteachers oversee CPC implementation and handle reported cases. Purposive sampling was also used to select one parent per school [e.g., a school committee member involved in CPC activities] who could give informed views on school-family collaboration in child protection.

Table 1: Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Category	Population	Sample	Sampling technique
Schools	82	12	Simple random
Teachers	1,766	240	Simple random
Headteachers	82	12	Purposive
Parents	82	12	Purposive
Total respondents	**1,930**	**264**	

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

Teachers completed a questionnaire with 10 Likert-scale items rated from 1 (Very Low Extent) to 5 (Very High Extent). The items covered awareness, reporting, education on children's rights, peer support, teacher training and community engagement. Headteachers and parents took part in face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured guide on how well CPCs work and what limits them.

Three specialists from the Open University of Tanzania reviewed the instruments for relevance, clarity and coverage of the objective. The instruments were piloted in two public primary schools outside the main sample, and [ambiguous items were reworded] based on the results. The questionnaire's reliability was tested with Cronbach's Alpha, giving a coefficient of ($\alpha = 0.879$), above the accepted threshold of 0.70. Trustworthiness of the qualitative data was ensured through triangulation across data sources and peer debriefing.

4.4 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained a research clearance letter from the Open University of Tanzania and permission from the (Dar es Salaam Regional Administrative Secretary and the Ilala Municipal Director), and from the heads of the sampled schools. Questionnaires were given to teachers in person and collected (within one week). Interviews with headteachers and parents were held in December 2025, lasted (30-45) minutes each and took place in private. They were [audio-recorded with consent] and later transcribed.

4.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and means) using (SPSS version 27). Item means were interpreted on the following scale: 1.00–1.80 Very Low Extent; 1.81–2.60 Low Extent; 2.61–3.40 Moderate Extent; 3.41–4.20 High Extent; 4.21–5.00 Very High Extent. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and reporting. The two strands were integrated by comparing each questionnaire item with the related interview themes.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the study's purpose and gave informed consent before taking part. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any stage without consequences. Names were not recorded; codes were used instead (e.g., HT1, P6). Data were stored securely and used only for this study. Because the topic is sensitive, interview questions focused on CPC practices rather than individual abuse cases, and no identifying details of any child were collected.

4. Results and Discussion

This section provides results of the study findings sought to examine the Extent do Child Protection Clubs Mitigate the Child Abuse in Public Primary Schools in Ilala Municipality. To obtain required data, teachers were provided with a five-point Likert scale to rate the extent scale with the statement provided. A summary of responses on the Extent do Child Protection Clubs Mitigate the Child Abuse in Public Primary Schools in Ilala Municipality is presented in Table 2

Table 2: Teachers' (TRs) Responses on the Extent do Child Protection Clubs Mitigate the Child Abuse in Public Primary Schools in Ilala Municipality (n=240 teachers)

S/N		VLE		LE		ME		HE		VHE		M
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
i	Child Protection Clubs have increased awareness of child abuse issues among pupils	15	6.3	22	9.2	75	31.3	109	45.4	19	7.9	3.40
ii	The presence of Child Protection Clubs creates a supportive environment for reporting cases of abuse	11	4.6	24	10.0	75	31.3	106	44.2	24	10.0	3.45
iii	Child Protection Clubs provide valuable education on children's rights and protection	7	2.9	11	4.6	66	27.6	124	51.9	31	13.0	3.67
iv	Participation in Child Protection Clubs empowers pupils to speak out against abuse	10	4.2	12	5.0	85	35.4	94	39.2	39	16.3	3.58
v	Child Protection Clubs foster peer support, making it easier for pupils to discuss abuse-related issues	5	2.1	20	8.3	84	35.0	99	41.3	32	13.3	3.55
vi	Child Protection Clubs contribute to training teachers on how to identify and respond to child abuse cases	5	2.1	24	10.0	73	30.4	97	40.4	41	17.1	3.60
vii	Child Protection Clubs actively engage the community in discussions about preventing child abuse	13	5.4	22	9.2	90	37.5	84	35.0	31	12.9	3.41
viii	Child Protection Clubs provide resources and information that help pupils understand how to protect themselves from abuse	14	5.8	31	12.9	50	20.8	108	45.0	37	15.4	3.51
ix	Activities organized by Child Protection Clubs effectively teach pupils about recognizing and preventing abuse	2	0.8	31	12.9	62	25.8	100	41.7	45	18.8	3.65
x	The existence of Child Protection Clubs in schools has increased in reported cases of child abuse in the school	18	7.5	30	12.5	55	22.9	93	38.8	44	18.3	3.48
	Grand Mean											**3.5**

Source: Field Data (2025)

Key: F=frequencies, % =Percentages

Data in Table 1 indicates that the moderate (53.3%) number of teachers rated Child Protection Clubs (CPCs), to a high extent and to a very high extent, as effective in increasing awareness of child abuse issues among pupils, also the minority 31.3% of teachers rated this as the case to a moderate extent. In contrast, 15.5% rated this aspect to a low extent and to a very low extent as less effective. The mean score for this aspect is 3.40%, indicating a high extent of effectiveness in Child Protection Clubs (CPCs) on pupils' awareness. The data imply that teachers perceive CPCs as quite effective in increasing awareness. The data indicate that pupils are engaged in

conversations about child abuse in which CPCs play a role empowering pupil with the knowledge they need to recognize and report abuse. This fosters a safer school environment and encourages pupils into taking active roles in protecting themselves and their peers. The results from teachers were supported by this Headteacher 1 during face-to-face interview who stated:

> Absolutely, I have seen positive changes: Pupils are now more vocal about their experiences and concerns. They feel empowered to report abuse, whether occurring at school, home, or within the community. Teachers have also noticed that pupils support each other and are encouraged to speak out when they face difficult situations (HT1, Personal Communication, 1 December 2025).

Headteacher 3 had the following to add during face-to-face interview:

> Yes, we have observed a rise in reported cases. More pupils are now willing to speak out, and they use the channels provided by CPCs to report abuse. This shows that the clubs have successfully broken the culture of silence that often surrounds child abuse (HT3, Personal Communication, 2 December 2025).

However, during an interview with Headteacher 5 from a different school, a contrasting viewpoint was shared:

> While CPCs are a commendable initiative, their impact is not uniform across all pupils. Some children participate actively and benefit, but others see the sessions as routine activities and don't take them seriously. We've even had situations where abuse occurred, but children didn't report it either for fear, confusion or lack of confidence in the system (HT5, Personal Communication, 4 December 2025).

The information gathered from teachers, headteachers, indicates the critical importance of Child Protection Clubs (CPCs) in safeguarding pupils against abuse. When effectively implemented within schools, CPCs equip children with the essential knowledge and confidence to recognize, resist, and report abusive situations. However, variation in pupil engagement and inconsistent application of knowledge among some children reveal the need for a more individualized and reinforced approach.

Data in Table 1 indicate that the majority (54.2%) of teachers indicated that CPCs are, to a high extent and to a very high extent effective in creating a supportive environment for reporting cases of abuse, with 31.3% indicating to a moderate extent. However, an extreme minority (14.6%) of teachers indicating advocating for this aspect to a low extent and to a very low extent. The mean score is 3.45%, reflecting a high effectiveness of the CPCs in creating a supportive environment for reporting cases of abuse. The data imply that teachers view the clubs as playing an essential role in not only raising awareness but also in establishing a supportive infrastructure where pupils are encouraged and feel safe to report cases of abuse. When pupils know there are safe channels for reporting abuse, the likelihood of reporting them will increase so is for addressed them timely. Data suggest that, by providing awareness and creating a supportive environment, CPCs help bridge the gap between pupils and the adults who are responsible for their protection. The observations from teachers were supported by Parent 1 during the face-to-face interview, who stated:

> I've also noticed that the awareness campaigns conducted by the club have given pupils the confidence to report abuse when they see or experience it. The support they provide is not only essential for the child, but it also reassures us as parents that our children are in a safe environment (P1, Personal Communication, December 2025).

In addition, Parent 6 had this to say:

> Of course, the CPCs are often involved in school assemblies, where they encourage open discussions and role-playing scenarios to reduce the fear associated with reporting abuse (P6, Personal Communication, December 2025).

However, during an interview with Headteacher 5, a contrasting view was shared:

> We still face cases where children, despite having access to CPCs, do not report abuse. This may be due to fear for disbelief or retaliation especially in communities where abuse is normalized. Some pupils also feel that even when they report such cases, nothing happens. So while clubs are helpful, more needs to be done to strengthen follow-up and build trust (HT5, Personal Communication, December 2025).

The information collected from teachers, parents, and headteachers indicates that while Child Protection Clubs (CPCs) are beneficial in creating supportive environments for abuse reporting, their long-term effectiveness depends on consistent reinforcement, trust-building, and participatory implementation. The data show that CPCs help children gain the confidence to report abuse, recognize unsafe situations, and seek help from trusted adults. However, the existence of lingering fear, lack of follow-up or cultural silence in some communities suggests that the system must go beyond one-time interventions. The available support mechanisms and a culture of accountability are essential

to ensure that children not only understand their rights but also feel empowered and safe to exercise them.

Data in Table 1 on the provision of valuable education on children's rights and protection indicate that, the majority (64.9%) of teachers indicated that to a high extent and to a very high extent CPCs is effective, with the minority 27.6% of teachers indicating to a moderate extent. Conversely, a low extent and very low extent (7.5%) rated this aspect as less effective. The mean score is 3.67per cent, suggests a high extent of effectiveness. The data imply that clubs play an important role in informing pupils about their rights and protection mechanisms. Teachers believe that CPCs create awareness about the importance of respecting the rights of others, which fosters a safer and more supportive school atmosphere. To contribute to the roles of CPCs, one of the Headteachers 7 had the following to share;

> Although creating a safe reporting atmosphere is supposed to be a priority, in practice it has been challenging. Many pupils still hesitate to report abuse because they fear retaliation or are worried about whether their concerns would be handled confidentially and appropriately. While we have a designated Child Protection Officer, there are instances where trust has not been fully established, and some cases are not followed up promptly, which undermines the confidence pupils have in the system (HT7, Personal Communication, December 2025).

In addition, Focus Group Discussion 6 with pupils generated the following comments:

> Yes! Our Child Protection Club (CPC) teaches us about our rights and what to do if we feel unsafe. Additionally, we also have role-plays during school assemblies where we learn how to report bad things (FGD6, Personal Communication, December 2025).

The insights gathered from teachers, HT7, and FGD6 suggest that, although, pupils still hesitate to report abuse, Child Protection Clubs (CPCs) act as a vital link between pupils and school authorities, ensuring that children are informed about their rights, feel safe, and have accessible channels to report abuse. This ultimately contributes to a more secure and supportive school environment.

Data in Table 1 indicate that the moderate (55.5%) number of teachers indicated that CPCs are, to a high extent and to a very high extent, effective in empowering pupils to speak out against abuse, with the minority (35.4%) of teachers indicating advocacy to this phenomenon to a moderate extent. Conversely, the extreme minority (9.2%) of teachers indicated that to a low extent and to a very low extent this aspect is less active. The mean score is 3.58 per cent, indicating a high extent of usefulness. The data imply that teachers viewed CPCs as highly effective in empowering pupils to speak out against abuse. The data indicate further that, the ability of pupils to speak out is a critical aspect of addressing and preventing abuse.

The results were supported by one of the Parent 12, during a face-to-face interview, who had the following to add:

> I understand that CPCs educate children about their rights and help them feel safe. They teach pupils how to recognize abuse and encourage them to speak out if they experience or witness anything harmful (P12, Personal Communication, December 2025).

The information from Parent 11 implies that Child Protection Clubs (CPCs) play a crucial role in educating pupils about their rights and fostering a sense of safety within the school environment. By teaching children how to recognize abuse and empowering them to speak out without fear, CPCs help to create a proactive approach to child protection. This suggests that awareness and education are key factors in encouraging children to report abuse, ultimately contributing to a safer and more supportive learning environment.

Another parent, 11, during a face-to-face interview, cemented on the above information by adding the following:

> While my child talks more about safety now and knows they can report abuse, I'm still worried that many children remain silent. There is a fear among some pupils that reporting could lead to gossip, stigma, or even punishment. Not all trusted teachers or CPC members handle cases sensitively, which discourages some children from speaking up. Thus, despite the progress, there is still a long way to go before every child feels truly safe to report (P12, Personal Communication, December 2025).

The information gathered from both teachers and parents 11 and 12, suggests a positive impression of Child Protection Clubs (CPCs) on children's ability to openly discuss safety concerns, indicating a growing culture of awareness and child advocacy in schools. However, there is a fear among some pupils that reporting could lead to gossip, stigma, or even punishment. . The findings align with broader child protection strategies that focus on education, early intervention, and the creation of safe reporting mechanisms to protect children's well-being. Ultimately, CPCs act as a bridge between pupils, teachers, and school authorities, promoting a collaborative approach to effectively preventing and addressing abuse.

Data in Table 1 illustrate that CPCs were also credited for training teachers on identifying and responding to child abuse cases, with the moderate majority (57.5%) of teachers rating them as effective. Also, the minority

(30.4%) of teachers indicates this as effective to a moderate extent. In contrast, the extreme minority (10.0%) rated this as less effective. The mean score is 3.60 per cent, indicating a high extent of usefulness. Data imply that CPCs are important because teachers play a critical role in recognizing the signs of abuse and taking the necessary actions to protect pupils. Effective training ensures that teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to identify abuse early, make appropriate reports, and support affected pupils in the right way. During a face-to-face interview, HT3 had the following to contribute;

> To be honest, while CPCs are intended to train teachers on how to spot and respond to signs of abuse, the follow-through has not been consistent. Many teachers still lack the confidence or clarity on how to handle such cases properly. In some schools, the collaboration between CPCs and staff is minimal, and not all teachers receive adequate training. This is worrying because teachers are in a position to notice early warning signs, but without proper support and knowledge, cases can easily go unnoticed or be mishandled (HT3, Personal Communication, December 2025).

During Focus Group Discussions with pupils from School 10, pupils had the following to contribute:

> Yes! we know that CPCs help teachers understand what to look for if a pupil is being hurt or is in trouble. If we feel scared or something is wrong, the teacher knows how to help us and keep it private (FGD10, Personal Communication, December 2025).

The information gathered from FGD 10, Teachers and HT3 underscores the crucial role of CPCs in creating a well-trained, responsive school environment that prioritizes the safety and well-being of pupils, though some teachers still lack the confidence or clarity on how to handle such cases properly. In some schools, the collaboration between CPCs and staff is minimal, and not all teachers receive adequate training.

Data in Table 1 show that the presence of CPCs in schools has increased the reported cases of child abuse, with a moderate 57.1% of teachers indicating to a high extent and to a very high extent, that these measures are effective. Meanwhile, the minority (20.0%) of teachers indicated that, to a low extent and to a very low extent CPCs were less effective, while the extreme minority (22.9%) of teachers indicating to a moderate extent CPCs were less effective. The mean score is 3.48 per cent, indicating that. To a high extent CPCs were helpful. The data imply that teachers view CPCs as effective in increasing the number of reported child abuse cases. It indicates the presence of CPCs has positively impacted both pupils and teachers in raising awareness about the importance of reporting abuse. However, one of the Head teachers from School 4 expressed concerns about the actual outcomes of CPC implementation, stating:

> While there has been some increase in reported cases, it's still not as significant as we expected. Many children remain hesitant to speak for fear of not being believed or of repercussions from adults or even peers. Although CPCs aim to empower pupils, in reality, not all children feel confident or safe enough to report abuse, especially in cases involving someone close to them. The support system is not yet strong or consistent across all schools (HT4, Personal Communication, December 2025).

This information from Headteacher 4 implies that while CPCs have created platforms for pupils to report abuse, challenges remain in ensuring that these platforms are genuinely effective and trusted by all children. The modest increase in reported cases may not reflect a widespread improvement, but rather a limited impact of CPC awareness campaigns on certain schools. Prior to the introduction of CPCs, many children likely remained silent for fear, cultural norms, or the lack of knowledge about their rights; these barriers are however, still prevalent among significant number of pupils.

In this respect, the HT 3 had this to say:

> Absolutely, in some schools, CPCs conduct awareness sessions where pupils learn about different forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. We've seen cases where children who previously suffered in silence now reporting incidents to their teachers or CPC leaders, who then amplify the cases to reach or Law Enforcement Officers (HT3, Personal Communication, December 2025)

While the HT3 acknowledged some progress, this observation also underscores that such outcomes are more evident in some schools, and not across the board. This reflects a lack of uniformity in the functionality and responsiveness of CPCs, suggesting that in many cases, these clubs are still underperforming or lack adequate support from school management or local authorities. The insights from the Headteacher and HT3 suggest that although CPCs are designed to promote proactive protection and child empowerment, the extent of their impact is uneven and sometimes minimal. Structural weaknesses such as inadequate training, stigma, inconsistent follow-up, and a lack of confidentiality continue to undermine children's confidence in reporting abuse.

Generally, the average mean score of all items was 3.50, indicating a high extent rating provided by teachers that Child Protection Clubs (CPCs) mitigate child abuse in public primary schools in Ilala Municipality. This high

extent rating underscores the importance of CPCs as a key school-based strategy for enhancing pupils' awareness of abuse, promoting reporting mechanisms, and fostering a protective environment within schools. The findings of the study are in line with those by Chyung and Hutchinson (2023), who emphasize that participatory school-based programs significantly enhance learners' awareness and engagement in addressing social challenges, including child protection issues. Moreover, the findings align with Ecological Systems Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), which posits that children's development and safety are shaped by interactions within multiple environmental systems; thus, CPCs function within the school (microsystem) and strengthen linkages with families and communities (mesosystem), creating interconnected support structures that enhance awareness, encourage reporting, and contribute to a safer and more protective school environment.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

The study concludes that Child Protection Clubs (CPCs) mitigate child abuse in public primary schools in Ilala Municipality to a high extent, as teachers demonstrate the use of school-based protective strategies such as awareness campaigns, peer support systems, reporting channels, and education on children's rights that enhance pupils' ability to recognize, resist, and report abuse. These practices support pupils' engagement in safeguarding processes and contribute to the creation of safer and more supportive school environments. However, this influence is not consistently realised in practice due to implementation gaps, including fear of reporting, stigma, inadequate follow-up of reported cases, limited teacher training, and variations in the functionality of CPCs across schools. As a result, some pupils remain hesitant to report abuse, and cases continue to occur despite the presence of these clubs, indicating that while CPCs are present and positively oriented, their actual impact is constrained by contextual and operational challenges, thereby necessitating improvements in implementation consistency, capacity building, and support systems to achieve effective child protection outcomes.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers should actively support and participate in Child Protection Clubs by integrating child protection topics into classroom practice and consistently guiding pupils on how to recognize and report abuse.
2. Pupils should be encouraged to participate actively in CPC activities and to use the available reporting channels confidently to address abuse-related issues.
3. Heads of schools should ensure effective implementation and supervision of Child Protection Clubs.
4. Heads of schools should provide continuous training for teachers on child protection.
5. Heads of schools should strengthen confidentiality and follow-up mechanisms for reported cases.
6. Heads of schools should collaborate with parents and community stakeholders to build trust and make CPCs more effective in safeguarding children.

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