The Impact of Child Protection Policy on Omani Classrooms

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Abstract. The practice of child protection plays a key role in the work of professionals dealing with children. The current paper proposes a novel child protection policy for Omar Bin Al-Khattab Private School (OBK), Oman. This paper considers that the proposed OBK protection policy clearly directs staff about expected behavior while working with protection-related issues applied in the school context. Two methodologies were utilized including a questionnaire (a quantitative method) and interviews (a qualitative method) with the school staff for data collection to evaluate the significance of the proposed policy. Results indicated a statistical significant difference among the staff members' attitudes where females were more positive towards the adoption of the child protection policy rather than males. Moreover, findings revealed statistically significant differences in the staff members' perceptions in terms of their positions. Interviews' results provided the main reasons of child abuse along with the strategies followed to support the maltreated pupils.

Keywords: Child protection, policy, safe guarding, abuse, maltreatment, neglect.

1. Introduction

Child protection system (CPs) is a vital international phenomenon. It emphasized preventing abuse and maltreatment. Historically, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Child Rights Convention in 1989 to prevent any possible harm that could confront children and ensure that their rights are protected (Mulinge, 2010). Since a great deal of children annually fall victims as a result of violence or abuse across the world (UNICEF, 2003).

Child abuse, as stated in World Health Organization (2006), is categorized as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Firstly, physical abuse refers to any deliberate physical maltreatment resulting from slapping, beating, biting, kicking, throwing, scalding, suffocating, punching or cutting. It's also caused by inducing the symptoms of a child illness. A child corporal abuse is a damaging act so that laws are enacted by societies to prohibit this harsh act (Mathews & Kenny, 2008). Secondly, sexual abuse indicates obliging young people to be engaged in sexual actions with older people or adults regardless of the violence level or the child's awareness of this action. This type of abuse includes both contact and noncontact activities that occur through forcing a young person to visualize inappropriate images, watch or listen to any sexual scenes, and prepare them for abuse. Elrod and Robin (1993) believe that parents are fully in charge of instructing themselves as well as their children of sexual abuse. Adult males do not perform sexual abuse activities on their own. Women along with children can carry out activities of sexual abuse. Eventually, emotional abuse features the following behaviors: (1) Psychological harm that causes children to feel hated, useless or frightened. (2) Silencing children to prevent them from expressing their opinions and criticize the way they interact. (3) Imposing expectations on young people that are improper to their age or developmental ability. (4) Witnessing others being bullied which lead them to feel a sense of fear. (5) Neglect, as pointed by Child Family Community Australia (2012), is the inability to satisfy the needs of children emotionally or physically. Consequently, they suffer from health or developmental problems. Gilbert et al. (2009) and United Nations (2000) represent neglect as a failure to ensure essential needs, save them from tangible harm, provide appropriate guidance and offer sufficient medical or health care.

This paper discusses protection issues among children in Omar Bin Al-Khattab Private School as an educational institution in Oman to reduce the amount of abused young pupils. Data of this article included a sample of 42 staff members. The respondents were asked closed questions through a child abuse questionnaire about their child abuse cases. The used instruments added more value to the current paper.

2. Literature Review

Child protection, in a hypothetical sense, is a social-oriented term involving childhood interpretations that include child risk discourses, vulnerability and protection (Hacking, 1991; Parton et al., 1997). Child protection, as defined by HM Government (2006), is the employed strategies to safeguard any abused or neglected child to enable them grow safely and with optimum care. The Child Right Act (2003) casts the light on the superiority of a child's welfare. It provides the government with a full responsibility of ensuring policies and procedures to safeguard children from maltreatment or abuse. World Health Organization (1999) showed that about 40 million children, aging less than 14 years, suffer badly from abuse. This number is argued to be increased in other studies (Svevo-Cianci et al., 2010). However, child abuse means any act or behavior that intends to cause serious harm to a young person or the failure to stop a significant harm.

Experts exert their best efforts to avoid children from exposure to maltreatment (Thorpe, 1994). Professionals are supposed to acknowledge injury to protect maltreated children (Moynihan & Webb, 2010). School psychologists' work differs in many countries and is influenced by some external and internal aspects. The external aspects include culture, economy and local priorities. The internal aspects involve school psychology profession in every single state (Jimerson et al., 2007). However, child's prevention and protection systems are the most prominent areas for school psychologists. As mentioned by Jimerson et al. (2007), school psychologists (SPs) cooperate with other specialists internationally in order to guarantee a child welfare promotion which is supported by different studies. Phasa (2008) investigated sexual abuse upon teachers in South Africa. Katsurada (2007) examined the influence of institutionalization on children attachment patterns in Japan. Lasser and Adam (2007) evaluated the war's impact on children. Guzzo et al. (2007) explored the prevention of drug abuse and violence in Brazil. Moreover, Germain et al. (1985) studied the prevention nature with vulnerable children and their families, while Veiga et al. (2009) analyzed the promotion of children's rights. Cassidy et al. (2009) revealed combating cyber-bullying caused by the latest changes in technology. In addition to preventive work, SPs play a vital role in critical incident response. Jimerson et al. (2007) debated that the shooting incident of Erfurt school in 2002 led to develop a multi-agency group of professionals in Germany.

Professionals work together with SPs in the UK to monitor and safeguard young individuals' welfare (HM Government, 2004). German et al. (2000) conducted a questionnaire of SPs work with regard to the issue of child protection, they concluded that SPs' responsibilities, including child protection training and safeguarding, were increased. Since 2000, safeguarding interventions encompassed areas of parenting initiatives (Farrell et al., 2006), anti-bullying (Smith et al., 2008) and domestic abused victims' act (Dodd, 2009).

According to Briggs and Hawkins (1997), Brown (2008), Goldman (2007), and Goldman and Grimbeck (2008), teachers contributed to protect children though they are ill-prepared to handle child protection-related issues as they feel apprehensive to deal with families at risk of maltreatment (Bishop et al., 2002). They hesitate to react to any student trying to reveal their cases of maltreatment (David, 1993; Rossato & Brackenridge, 2009) and they feel concerned to provide statements of maltreated cases (Mckee & Dillenburger, 2010; Watts & Laskey, 1994). Palmer et al. (2001) revealed in their studies that more than 90% of teachers in Queensland were not trained to reach school provided services, assist families and their children in any life matter like abuse and economic problems. Social workers are considered successful experts to respond to issues of child protection and to bridge counseling with development of social work (Davey et al., 2000). They are the most appropriate specialists in combining support systems of abused children with their households in defensive and instructive structures. In this study, some parts of the literature review were prepared according to the guidelines provided by Salloum et al. (2018a), Salloum et al. (2017a), Al-Emran and Shaalan (2015a), Al Emran and Shaalan (2014a), Mhamdi (2017b), Al Emran and Shaalan (2014b), Al-Emran (2015), Salloum et al. (2016), Salloum et al. (2017b), Salloum et al. (2017c), Salloum et al. (2017d), Salloum et al. (2017e), Salloum et al. (2018b), Al-Emran et al. (2015), Mhamdi et al. (2018), Zaza and Al-Emran (2015), Lachheb (2014), Mhamdi (2016), Mhamdi (2017a), Mhamdi (2017c), Al-Qaysi (2016).

3.   The Proposed Protection Policy

The hierarchical structure of Omar Bin Al-Khattab Private School (OBK) is organized as follows: the principal, six directors where each director is responsible for particular campus, supervisors, coordinators and teachers. OBK is committed to ensure peace and protection to all pupils, regardless of their age, gender, race, disability, or religion, from abuse. The students' health, welfare and safety go ahead the list of the school priorities.

OBK must ensure prevention by positively ensuring a peaceful school atmosphere and teaching methods to students. It must also safeguard students through the adoption of certain procedures that ensure staff to be capable of promoting the welfare of a child well-being.

3.1. Policy Objectives

OBK aims to ensure a great deal of objectives including safety procedures to all students whether inside or outside school grounds through adherence to child protection law. Moreover, OBK will educate all staff of the expected behavior while encountering protection-related concerns to prevent bullying resulting in raising students' educational, emotional, and moral progress. Furthermore, it will form a leadership team of designated school staff from every section comprising KG to high school and will try to enhance the curriculum with a variety of activities and skills that they require to feel secure. The school exerts efforts to establish working relations with professionals, colleagues, and parents within the school to report abused children.

3.2. Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Each person working directly for the school has specified duties under the procedures of protecting students. The principal is in charge of the management and day-to-day procedures of the school, His or her responsibilities include maintaining proper discipline and managing the school. The director is considered a guardian who is supposed to meet with the leadership team on a regular basis to dispute child protection matters and share the most appropriate practice procedures. The director is also required to send a written report of the maltreated cases, based on the leadership team investigation reports. In addition to a leadership team that is responsible for reporting any case of abuse and for recording child concerns. Furthermore, it is in charge of establishing norms to encourage children to talk as well as informing children of the duties that are available to help them while feeling insecure. Moreover, the coordinator's role lies in monitoring the adopted child protection processes in the school and referring to the ministry of education. Obviously, coordinators are not allowed to give information of any individual to any party in order to ensure an effective policy. Supervisors manage to replace the coordinators frequently to inform the employed staff of the followed internal procedures. They are also in charge of reporting the maltreated cases to the leadership team.

3.3. Child Protection Practices

An increasing number of practices are employed in OBK containing training, educational confidentiality, allegations against staff, records and parent involvement. First, teachers and staff are required to join child protection awareness workshops to carry out their student-based duties effectively. They will be highly supported at three yearly intervals with guidance to help with any doubts about child protection. Second, confidentiality issue should be fully comprehended and maintained by every member handling children. The data of this issue are ought to be precise and updated to be securely stored with limited designated members, comprising the principal, leadership team, parents of the abused students and the school owner. Regarding allegations against staff, it is the staff's responsibility to raise the concerns of their colleagues' suspected attitudes shown designated people as children. Statements that address a staff member are supposed to refer to the principal for taking actions regarding all the alleged staff members. However, if the statement is made against the principal, the owner will probe it to keep the child safe and sound. In terms of records and monitoring, it is the school responsibility to keep file notes of the students being monitored for child protection reasons in a separate confidential file. These notes must be recorded with the date, time, location, and event of any said or seen abuse disclosures or indicators. These files will be transferred with the student when they are moving to another school. Finally, parent involvement helps their children to be prevented from abuse risks. Kolko et al. (1987) asserted that most of parents who took a part in the educational program are more aware of child protection policy. They have a better communication with their children about child abuse issues.

Parents, care takers, and guardians play an integral role in relation to the school policy. They are required to be familiar with the importance of the school-implemented policy by maintaining good contact with children and discussing abuse issues with them. As remarked by Baratsikos (2010), parents strongly claimed that abuse risks vary between males and females. Females were more vulnerable to abuse than males. However, it is observed that males recorded cases of sexual abuse.

3.4. Policy Implementation

The policy of protecting young individuals from ill-treatment is a difficult task. Any organization is supposed to employ a strongly planned strategy of abuse prevention that should include the following steps: (1) Having clear goals and effective means to reach them. (2) Creating a secure environment so that staff can easily discuss issues of policy effectiveness. (3) Keeping abreast of any changes in international, national or more locally based issues that may impact the policy or its implementation and taking action to remove barriers blocking its full implementation. (4) Accepting feed-back on any difficulties in the policy implementation from any source and working to alleviate these difficulties. (5) Ensuring that all documentation is up to date and kept safely.

3.5. Policy Evaluation

OBK is committed to the evaluation of policy implementation by supporting management to maintain a work environment where feed-back, on-going learning, review, contribution of opinions, correction, clarification and positive challenge are accepted attributes to the ministry work ethics. In addition, monitoring the policy formally and informally when the annual report is written as well as a review of the process in every case was pursued legally. This will be best undertaken with those concerned in reporting, the designated member(s) and any other person whose competence is deemed helpful. Furthermore, enabling a process where lessons are learned from reviewed cases along with ensuring that the policy itself is reviewed and updated. To this end, we are seeking to answer the following research questions to evaluate the significance of child protection policy in Oman:

RQ1: Is there a statistical significant difference towards child protection policy adoption with regard to *gender*?

RQ2: Is there a statistical significant difference towards child protection policy adoption with regard to *age*?

RQ3: Is there a statistical significant difference towards child protection policy adoption with regard to *staff members' position*?

RQ4: What are the main reasons of child abuse?

RQ5: What are the main strategies that could be followed to support pupils at risk?

4.   Methodology

This experimental study took part at Omar Bin Al-Khattab Private School in Al-Buraimi, Oman with various staff members. Questionnaires and interviews were utilized for data collection. These are the same procedures followed by Al-Qaysi and Al-Emran (2017), Al-Emran and Salloum (2017), Al-Emran and Shaalan (2017), Al-Emran and Malik (2016), Malik and Al-Emran (2018), Al-Emran and Shaalan (2015b), Al-Emran et al. (2016), Al-Maroof and Al-Emran (2018), Al-Emran (2014) in terms of conducting the questionnaires. The questionnaire was given to a total of 42 of staff members who were randomly selected to investigate the effectiveness of the proposed policy in the school (see Appendix 1). Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 nominated individuals, who were randomly selected to investigate the child protection policy and its effectiveness (see Appendix 2). These interviews included the principal, two directors, one coordinator, three supervisors and three teachers; they were from different nationalities, ages and genders. The researcher began each interview by explaining the topic of the study and its goals to the respondents. Each interview has been recorded after taking the permission from the participants. Each interview took around 20 minutes.

5. Findings and Discussions

RQ1: Is there a statistical significant difference towards child protection policy adoption with regard to *gender*?

An independent sample *t*-test was utilized to investigate statistical significant differences among the staff members' perceptions to adopt the child protection policy in terms of their genders. The results as demonstrated in (Table 1), indicated a significant difference among the staff members' perceptions (p = 0.029, $p <= 0.05$), females showed more positive attitudes towards the adoption of the child protection policy than males. This is due to the fact that female teachers are more than males in the school.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean	t	Df	Sig
Male	10	2.7231	0.66291	0.20963	-2.266	40	0.029
Female	32	3.4880	0.99620	0.17610			

Table 1. Perception towards the adoption of child protection policy with regard to gender

RQ2: Is there a statistical significant difference towards child protection policy adoption with regard to *age*?

In order to verify the possibility of having any statistical significant difference among the staff members' perceptions towards the adoption of child protection policy in terms of age, means and standard deviations for the staff members' ages are investigated as shown in Table 2. Moreover, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is performed to examine significant differences between mean values. As results indicated in Table 3, there is no statistical significant difference (p = 0.110, $p > 0.05$) in the perceptions of staff members with regard to their ages and the registered F value is (2.151).

Age	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error
22 – 28	16	3.7212	0.98465	0.24616
29 – 38	12	3.2756	1.04984	0.30306
39 – 45	9	2.7949	0.86174	0.28725
Above 45	5	2.9692	0.46980	0.21010
Total	42	3.3059	0.97752	0.15083

Table 2. Mean and standard deviations for staff members' Ages

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.687	3	1.896	2.151	0.110
Within Groups	33.490	38	0.881		
Total	39.177	41			

Table 3. ANOVA test for staff members' Ages

RQ3: Is there a statistical significant difference towards child protection policy adoption with regard to *staff members' position*?

As depicted in (Table 4), means and standard deviations of the members' positions were calculated in order to verify any significant difference among the staff members' perceptions towards the adoption of Child Protection Policy with regard to their positions. In addition, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is performed to test any significant difference in the mean values. The findings in (Table 5) revealed that there are statistical significant differences (p = 0.008, $p < = 0.05$) among the staff members' perceptions in terms of their position and the F value is (4.578). Furthermore, the Tukey test for post-hoc comparisons is carried out to determine the differences in the means. Results revealed that there are statistical differences among the staffs' perceptions between coordinators and supervisors where the differences are in favor of supervisors.

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error
Director	6	2.9103	0.44434	0.18140
Coordinator	4	2.1154	0.39970	0.19985
Supervisor	5	4.1385	0.98118	0.43880
Teacher	27	3.4160	0.94987	0.18280
Total	42	3.3059	0.97752	0.15083

Table 4. Mean and standard deviations for staff members' positions

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.401	3	3.467	4.578	0.008
Within Groups	28.776	38	0.757		
Total	39.177	41			

Table 5. ANOVA test for staff members' positions

On the basis of the conducted semi-structured interviews, the researcher gathered data for the analysis process according to participants' viewpoints. The interviewees confirmed the significant role of protecting children from abuse and highlighted engaging families in the protection policy. It is obvious that the range of activities that are carried out by the school in accordance with child safeguarding involve the main educational work of management, consultation, training and evaluation. Duties that are identified by the staff contributed to abuse recognition, management, disclosures, and direct training.

RQ4: What are the main reasons of child abuse?

Abuse cases are categorized into neglect, emotional, physical and sexual forms. Interviewees estimated that the majority of cases are emotionally abused in different ways. They could be verbally insulted, embarrassed, or avoided, while some were threatened and isolated. The second biggest category consisted of neglect victims. These victims were left without adequate clothing or supervision. Physically abused children formed the third most harmed category, since some were being hit, kicked, slapped or had objects thrown at them. As stated in the interviews, children were abused by different people including their family members, care takers, or other adults. Six interviewees stated that one of the reasons that led to concerns about a student's welfare is observing an injury or interaction between two children or a child with an adult. Two interviewees added they might look neglected or bullied.

Interviewees signify that gender and age affect abusive work. They revealed females were more likely subjected to sexual abuse than males; however, males were more likely subjected to be physically or emotionally abused. Three interviewees argued that the number of harm-risked children is getting decreased as they grow up. One respondent said: "children who are less than one year are most likely to be abused than children aging between one and four years." One supervisor mentioned an example of a girl that was emotionally abused by a teacher. The girl said: "backing me into the corner until I was crying. She just left me and walked away."

Seven interviews added that the abused students, in an academic sense, showed signs of educational problems leading them to experience school failure. Child abuse negatively impacts children's language and cognitive development. Socially, feelings of pessimism, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and lack of confidence result in anti-social and behavioral traits. Most interviewees argued that they shouldn't make promises that they are not able to keep or take a responsibility solely. The following steps are suggested by the interviewees to be taken when a child reveals an abuse including relaxing with no interruption, showing belief, informing them of your next step, and referring to any designated member.

RQ5: What are the main strategies that could be followed to support pupils at risk?

The school follows several procedures to help abused students as repeated by the directors and coordinators. Firstly, implementing management policies about school behavior including physical intervention abuse and anti-bullying. Secondly, positively ensuring a secure school environment to help pupils feel more admired. Thirdly, maintaining a regular contact with other professionals to support children and their families. The last strategy is offering training workshops to support staff in handling child abuse situations. Socially, interviewees advised people who suspect that a child is being abused or is at risk of being abused to write a report to child protection authorities. Nationally, members of the police force, followed by school personnel and social workers commonly made notifications. One interviewee added the least common sources of notifications were from child care personnel and children reporting risks to their own wellbeing. Promoting parents' awareness of the school child protection policy is one of the stated recommendations to strengthen their children academic achievements. Children are supposed to grow up in an abuse-free environment in order to develop their skills and enjoy their childhood safely and benefit the society in a positive way. Moreover, government agencies are highly recommended to increase their running child protection-based workshops that follow the educational standards of the Ministry and lead to prosperous future for children.

6. Conclusion and Future Work

Child protection policy is a commitment to protect children from any kind of abuse by adopting certain procedures like safe recruitment, guidance, and reporting actual or suspected abuse cases. Despite the efforts of child protection system, child maltreatment remains a serious problem. The present paper proposed a child protection policy for Omar Bin Al-Khattab Private School in Oman. It has been remarked that child prevention from harm systems are not well implemented. The school is committed to set strongly planned strategies to reduce the number of abuse victims. The researcher utilized two methodologies including a questionnaire (a quantitative method) and interviews (a qualitative method) with the school staff for data collection to analyze the significance of the proposed policy. Five research questions underpin the present study. Omar Bin Al Khattab Private School (OBK) at Al Buraimi Governorate, Oman was the site of this study. 42 staff members took part in the study. The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS software.

The results indicated a significant difference among the staff members' perceptions in terms of their genders ($p = 0.029$, $p <= 0.05$). Females showed more positive attitudes towards the adoption of the child protection policy than males. Similarly, the findings revealed that there are statistical significant differences ($p = 0.008$, $p < = 0.05$) among the staff members' perceptions in terms of their position and the F value is (4.578). Furthermore, the Tukey test for post-hoc comparisons is carried out to determine the differences in the means. Results revealed that there are statistical differences among the staff perceptions between coordinators and supervisors where the differences are in favor of supervisors. On the other side, results showed no statistical significant difference ($p = 0.110$, $p > 0.05$) in the perceptions of staff members with regard to their ages. The conducted semi-structured interviews revealed the interviewees' confirmation regarding the significant role of protecting children from abuse and highlighted engaging families in the protection policy.

In the present study, we have targeted Omar Bin Al Khattab Private School, Oman. Only 42 staff members took part within the study. As a future direction, the researcher is interested in examining child protection policy at other schools in Oman by investigating other factors. Samples from other different schools will definitely add more value to the observed results. It is proposed to increase the number of staff members in order to add more value to the current results.

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Appendix 1

Child Protection Policy Questionnaire

Section 1: Personal Information						
Gender: □ Male □ Female						
Age: □ 22 – 28. □ 29 – 38. □ 39 – 45. □ Above 45.				**Position:** □ Director. □ Coordinator. □ Supervisor. □ Teacher.		
Section 2: Staff members' perceptions towards the implementation of the proposed child protection policy.						
No.	**Question**	**Strongly Disagree (1)**	**Disagree (2)**	**Neutral (3)**	**Agree (4)**	**Strongly Agree (5)**
1	The school ensures a peaceful educational atmosphere.					
2	Students are safe on school buses.					
3	The curriculum is enhanced with safety-based activities.					
4	Abused children feel neglected.					
5	The staff is aware of their roles to activate the policy.					
6	The school provides protection awareness workshops.					
7	Children are encouraged to reveal their abuses constantly.					
8	The students' allegations referred directly to the directors.					
9	There are suspicious cases of abuse among students.					
10	Some suspicious abuse cases are reported.					
11	The students' allegations are stored confidentially.					
12	Parents are involved in the policy.					
13	Security cameras reduce the number of abuses.					

Appendix 2

Interview Questions

1. What do you think are the main causes of child abuse?
2. What reasons raise concerns about a child well-being?
3. To what extent can you recognize signs and symptoms of child physical abuse?
4. Which groups of pupils are particularly at risk of abuse or neglect?
5. In your professional experience, how does abuse affect a child?
6. What actions do you make when a child discloses their abuse?
7. What strategies does the school follow to support pupils at risk?
8. Who makes reports to child protection authorities?