

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **OFFICIAL STATEMENT of Save the Children Philippines on the Alarming Rate of Student Suicide Cases and Attempts in Academic Year 2021-2022**

Save the Children Philippines is deeply concerned for the health and well-being of millions of Filipino learners, following the escalation of suicide cases and attempts among students in 2021, as reported by the Department of Education.

Our country's mental health crisis is a public health concern that requires an urgent whole-community approach response.

The gravity of the issue cannot be overlooked as the suicide rates may even increase in the coming years, if left unaddressed. To protect an entire generation from violence and untimely deaths, we need the national agencies and local governments to immediately act and work together to prevent years of progress from being reversed.

Save the Children believes that children from all backgrounds and identities have the right to mental health. All children deserve to live and learn in a safe and nurturing environment that will allow them to develop their social and emotional skills, increase their space for play and interaction with peers, and provide them access to high quality mental health care and psychosocial support services.

Now more than ever, the inequalities experienced by our learners -that were exposed and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic- should be put to an immediate end. Filipino learners should not face stressors and challenges alone. We have to be there for and with them in these trying times, and respond to their issues effectively to build back better for and with children.

Thus, we urge the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), together with the Department of Education (DepEd) to be at the forefront in curbing its impact.

We also call the DOH to prioritize the integration of mental healthcare into primary care by increasing the availability and accessibility of mental health services, and training primary care professionals on the promotion, prevention, care and protection.

We call on the DSWD to complement social welfare programs with child-friendly community-based mental health programs that address not only individual mental health and psychosocial needs but the overall psychosocial needs of the family unit as well.

Mental health services should be strengthened to support children with special protection needs such as children with disabilities, indigenous children, children in alternative care, children in street situations, children affected by disasters, climate change, and armed conflict, children in conflict with the law, and other children victims of violence.

We call on the DepEd to develop and implement school-based mental health programs to help learners cope with stressors arising from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other issues such as gender-based violence and bullying. We also urge DepEd to ensure that there are sufficient school personnel who are capacitated to provide support to learners to handle their psychosocial challenges, and make necessary referrals to other professionals, if needed.

**Statement of Save the Children Philippines CEO Atty. Alberto Muyot:**

*“We have to break the stigma and tear down the environment of shame that have cloaked generations of children in silence and prevented them from enjoying their right to live in a safe and healthy environment.*

*We can save millions of children affected if we raise awareness and deepen the conversation on mental health; make information, programs, and services readily available; strengthen the capacity of children, parents, duty bearers, and the community to respond and address children’s mental health issues, and reinforce multisectoral collaboration to strictly ensure and monitor the full implementation of related laws and policies.*

*Mentally healthy learners have better academic outcomes, forge healthy interpersonal relationships, and have an increased chance of a fulfilling adult life.*

*Let us invest in children’s mental health and well-being by creating a better world that will positively transform their lives and the future we share.”*

Save the Children Philippines supports the proposed Senate Bill No. 379 or the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act as we strongly advocate for the development of policies and programs for mental health promotion and prevention in our basic education institutions as stipulated in the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 11036 or the Mental Health Act.

Save the Children promotes a cross-sectoral, multi-layered approach in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in order to meet the ‘continuum of care’ needs of all children and families through its mental health literacy and character-building programs, capacity training for parents and caregivers, and provision of materials and technical trainings for teachers.

Save the Children Philippines also aims to directly impact the lives of 28 million learners enrolled, and those under the formal and non-formal education system, and reach children and their families, especially those most impacted by inequality and discrimination, through its programs on Heart to Healthy, Empowered, and Responsible Teens (Heart to HEART), child-parent development programs adopted from the International Child Development Program (ICDP), and the development of teacher's manuals such as the Teacher's Manual for Fostering Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for Adolescents, and the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Manual for Bangsamoro Learners.

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Notes to the Editor:

During the Senate hearing of the Committee on Basic Education on 31 January 2023, Assistant Education Secretary Dexter Galban reported that the Department of Education recorded a total of 404 learners who died by suicide, and 2,147 learners who have attempted suicide in the Academic Year 2021-2022.

Globally identified as the fourth leading cause of death among 15 to 19-year-olds<sup>1</sup>, suicide rates have been increasing even before the pandemic. Basing from the Global School-based Student Health Survey 2019<sup>2</sup>, among the surveyed Filipino learners aged 13-17, 23.1% seriously considered attempting suicide during the 12 months before the survey, and 24.3% attempted suicide one or more times during the 12 months before the survey. This is a significant increase from the 11.6% and 16.8%, respectively, in the 2015 survey results<sup>3</sup>.

In 2018, the DOH and Save the Children Philippines co-published the Harmonized Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Training Manual, in collaboration with DepEd and DSWD. The development of the material, primarily, aims to establish a common understanding, language, and approach on MHPSS service delivery across agencies.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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<sup>1</sup> [Adolescent mental health \(who.int\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [2019-philippines-fact-sheet.pdf \(who.int\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [pih2015-fact-sheet.pdf \(who.int\)](#)