

Residential care settings for children in the Philippines: Examining their transnational and neocolonial characteristics and the implications for children's social welfare

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Abstract

This article investigates the contemporary transnational and neocolonial characteristics of children's welfare in the Philippines, drawing on the perspectives of young people in residential care settings (RCSs) (aka orphanages) as well as the views of programme and policy actors embedded across child protection systems. Its findings highlight the funding and governance roles of transnational actors in child and family welfare programmes, the commodification of children that these transnational dynamics engender and the Philippines' dependence on international actors to support children's welfare. Recommendations include the enhanced regulation of RCSs, expanded social protection measures and greater use of family-based care models.

Keywords

Institutional care, neocolonialism, orphanage, Philippines, residential care setting

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Introduction

Post-independence (granted in 1946), all levels of the Philippines government have provided minimal levels of social welfare to citizens; subsequent improvements to poverty and inequality have been marginal, with the 2016 United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) ranking the Philippines 116th out of 188 countries (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2017). A comparative study investigating child well-being in a range of countries in the Pacific Rim ranked the Philippines lowest overall and last on multidimensional measures across domains of well-being, including material well-being, health, education, risk and safety (Lau and Bradshaw, 2010). This is largely due to the entrenched ‘productivist’ orientation to social policy of the Philippine welfare state, whereby government prioritises accelerating the productive elements of society and promoting economic goals, while leaving social policy underdeveloped (Choi, 2012; Holliday, 2000).

Within this system, welfare provision relies on social supports flowing from economic growth (Choi, 2012), rather than specific policy interventions that protect or enhance the rights of citizens. A limited overall emphasis on social protection policies and programmes (Ramesh, 2014) is also related to the problematic relationship between decentralised governance and welfare policy in which local governments hold concentrated regulatory powers and the responsibility for a range of welfare interventions, yet often have limited capacity, funding or technical skills to deliver primary programmes to meet child and family welfare needs (UNICEF, 2016). This has led to long-term and acute social disadvantage for children and families. This includes 19.9 million, or 18.1 percent of the population living under the national poverty line (World Bank, 2023), and inequality remaining largely unchanged between 2003 (Gini index 46) and 2021 (Gini index 42), which is one of the highest in East Asia and the Pacific (World Bank, 2023). The Philippines remains among the countries with the highest prevalence of child malnutrition globally (UNICEF, 2022).

Children are also exposed to high levels of family violence, with one study finding that 44 percent of female participants and 47 percent of male participants had witnessed physical violence between their parents as a child (Mandal and Hindin, 2013). Corporal punishment is a tolerated practice, in both the family home and in schools and institutional settings such as orphanages (Ramiro and Madrid, 2022). Emotional and psychological abuse is widespread in the Philippines (Ramiro et al., 2010) as is sexual abuse, with one study finding that 17.1 percent of children aged between 13 and 18 were victims of sexual violence (Council for the Welfare of Children [CWC] and United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF], 2016). There are also a range of significant and additional safety risks for children to navigate such as child labour, commercial sexual exploitation (Roche et al., 2023), armed conflict and extra-judicial killings (Daly et al., 2015; Mapp and Gabel, 2017).

In response to these issues, civil society and community-driven approaches have expanded in attempts to meet the welfare needs of children and families (Department of Social Welfare and Development [DSWD], 2015). Correspondingly, the Philippines welfare sector has seen a rapid growth in the presence of an internationally directed and funded non-government sector playing an expansive role in welfare provision via direct funding, welfare programmes and social protection (Roche and Flores-Pasos, 2023). However, there are limited insights into the influence of these international actors on child and family welfare programmes, how they affect service provision and day-to-day practice, and what impact they have on child and family welfare outcomes.

The international features of welfare provision in the Philippines

Social welfare in the Philippines needs to be understood in its historical and colonial context. Spanish colonial approaches to welfare saw the development of church-based charities, institutions

and orphanages from 1620 onwards (Blanco and Panao, 2019). Later, the United States' control of the Philippines between 1898 and 1946 fostered partnerships between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government, including churches, missionaries and international welfare agencies (Blanco and Panao, 2019). Post-independence in 1946, NGOs, both domestic and international, have thrived within the expansive civil society of the Philippines, with many of these in the child and family welfare sector. The majority of funding for NGOs providing welfare programmes is from international funding sources and the private sector, with limited resources provided by government (DSWD, 2024; Roche and Flynn, 2021).

Much of the international welfare focus on domestic welfare issues in the Philippines is driven by responses to child maltreatment and children's protection. Child maltreatment issues are extensive, and the Philippines child protection system lacks coherence and resources and is often unable to provide interventions where needed (Roche and Flores-Pasos, 2023). Alternative care practices undertaken by families are widespread, yet largely informal and unsupported, while foster care is limited, hindered by capacities and limited budgets of local government (Blanco and Panao, 2019). Meanwhile, institutional approaches to children's care have become relied upon as a primary child protection response (Roche, 2020).

Residential care settings in the Philippines

Known locally in the Philippines as orphanages or children's shelters, institutional forms of care for children, referred to collectively as residential care settings (RCSs) in this article, are a major component of the service response to child protection issues and are highly utilised in the absence of support for family-based care (Roche et al., 2021). This is also the case across the South-East Asia region (Rogers et al., 2021) as well as other low- and middle-income countries, with an estimated 5.37 million children globally residing in institutions (Desmond et al., 2020). Orphanages are funded and administered by both government and private organisations of varying scale and purpose with much of the resourcing for these programmes originating from international sources (Roche and Flores-Pasos, 2023). In 2024, the Philippines Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) (2024) recorded 368 residential care programmes; however, others estimate many more, unlicensed or unregistered residential care programmes (Graff, 2018). Research exploring the life histories of children and young people in RCSs in the Philippines reveals that these children have diverse experiences of poverty, homelessness or insecure housing, parental mobility or absence, family breakdown and significant child maltreatment (Roche, 2020). The high use of institutional care has been found to be, in part, due to its capacity to provide children with protection, safeguarding and education opportunities, above and beyond other welfare programme types and family-based care (Roche, 2020).

The dominance of orphanages as a response to children's welfare in the Philippines is problematic, as long-standing research and advocacy highlight the negative impact of RCSs in the Global South for children. Specific concerns about the harmful nature of these environments include trauma, reduced cognitive and emotional development and a higher exposure to risks such as child labour, child sexual exploitation or trafficking (Atwine et al., 2005; Crampin et al., 2003; Lyneham and Facchini, 2019; Van Doore, 2016; Van Ijzendoorn et al., 2020). Residential care in low- and middle-income country contexts can also include low child to caregiver ratios and non-individualised care (Huynh, 2014), and these models of care also frequently fail to prepare young people for adulthood (Stein, 2014). Frequently, RCSs have low levels of accountability, are under resourced and receive limited oversight and regulation (Rus et al., 2017). Advocacy groups and major International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs) call for the ending of institutional care for children and the use of family-based care instead (Browne et al., 2006; Pinheiro, 2006; Save the

Children UK, 2009). In addition, the United Nations (UN) (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child advises that children be raised by their parents where possible, while the United Nations (UN) (2010) Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children encourages States to ‘to keep children in, or return them to, the care of their family’ (p. 2). Countries have also committed to phasing out institutions in favour of family-based care (UN, 2010, 2020).

Conceptual frameworks to support analysis of the welfare sector in the Philippines

We contend that there are three conceptual frameworks that have value in better understanding the circumstances of the child and family welfare programmes in the Philippines. First, a ‘transnational’ understanding of out-of-home care (including forms of residential care), elucidated by Ulybina (2023a, 2023b), refers to ‘power beyond the state’ involving political influence, governance or regulation that transcend national borders (Thiel and Maslanik, 2010). This is due to the efforts of the United Nations and other global agencies increasingly positioning out-of-home care (OOHC) as an international policy challenge, rather than solely a domestic concern (Ulybina, 2023a). This approach also highlights the major role and influence of transnational actors, typically, private, non-state actors who work across borders such as INGOs, transnational corporations, consultants, donors, individuals and others (Ulybina, 2023b). This can also include religious transnationalism in which faith-based organisations and communities work to promote their own religious objectives, values and interests across transnational contexts (Ulybina, 2023b).

Second, the phenomena of the ‘orphan industrial complex’ explicated by Cheney and Ucembe (2019) and Cheney and Rotabi (2016) provide a useful analytical framework. The orphan industrial complex draws attention to the commodification of children and RCSs for the economic and cultural interests of international donors, charities and adoption who are largely situated in the Global North (Cheney and Rotabi 2016; Cheney and Ucembe, 2019). This concept also highlights the rapid growth of RCSs for children in the Global South and how this has coincided with a globalisation of children’s welfare (Wang, 2010), the Western demand for engagement and experiences with orphans, and the development of a ‘rescue’ orientation to developing countries (Cheney and Ucembe, 2019; Wang, 2010). This occurs via international support through religious and secular charity, ‘voluntourism’, donations, inter-country adoption, as well as increases in funding and management by middle-class Westerners (Cheney and Ucembe, 2019; Rotabi et al., 2017; Wang, 2010).

Finally, we assert that the influence of neocolonialism in international relations has some value in better understanding the international dynamics of child and family welfare in the Philippines. Neocolonialism is characterised by subtle and unequal power relations, continuing racial oppression and global hegemonies (Wijesinghe et al., 2019) that are a product of colonialism (Dirlik, 2002). This concept draws attention to the ongoing nature of colonialism in relation to international capitalist structures (Wijesinghe et al., 2019), and it views former colonies, such as the Philippines, as continuing to be economically, politically or culturally influenced by other countries (Grosfoguel, 2007) via continuing structures of power and ‘ongoing global liquid forces’ (Wijesinghe et al., 2019: 1265).

In combination, these concepts direct attention to the power relations, macro systems and actions of RCSs and provide this study with an analytical framework to support its research objectives. This article now proceeds to explore young people’s and programme and policy actor accounts of RCSs in the Philippines, through the lens of the conceptual frameworks articulated above. In doing so it explores the extent to which characteristics of transnational OOHC, the

Table 1. Categories and numbers of study participants.

Participant category	Number (gender)
Current RCS residents	37 (m = 15, f = 22)
Former RCS residents	13 (m = 9, f = 4)
RCS staff	4
Child protection actors in local government area	13
National policy and programme actors	11
Interpreter	1
Total	79

orphan industrial complex and neocolonialism are present, as well as a discussion of what the implications of this may be for child and family welfare reform agendas in the Philippines. The article responds to the following research question:

Research Question (RQ). To what extent can RCSs in the Philippines be considered transnational and what are the implications of this for approaches to children's welfare practice and policy?

Methods

Study context and design

This study draws on qualitative data collected from field work undertaken in two locations in the Philippines – one small regional city and a highly populated urban centre. The specific locations are not reported here to maintain the anonymity of study participants. The field work focused on gathering the views of young people with experience of RCSs, as well as those with experience and expertise in relation to the provision of residential care and broader child protection and child welfare programmes. It partnered with two non-government RCSs to engage young people in the study, as well as gathered the views of child welfare experts drawn from a range of government and NGOs. The study design incorporated an interpretivist approach to qualitative inquiry which prioritises subjective interpretations and accounts of the social phenomena they experience (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Neuman, 2014). Qualitative methods were used for their potential to emphasise participants' experiences, understandings and expert interpretations of RCS contexts.

Participants

The study included 79 participants (listed in Table 1). RCSs were contacted directly and invited to participate in the study. Qualified social workers based in the participating organisations assisted in providing details of the study to young people. In total, 37 participants were young people (aged 15 or above) currently living in residential care (m = 15, f = 22), while another 13 participants had previous experience of living in residential care (m = 9, f = 4). Interviews were also conducted with 28 participants consisting of residential care staff, social workers, child protection actors within a local government area and policy and programme actors having expertise on the national context of child and family welfare. These participants were recruited using a snowballing technique (Flynn and McDermott, 2016), starting first with those in participating RCSs, and then those suggested by participants who held expertise of child and family welfare programmes and relevant

policy. These 28 participants represent a diversity of stakeholders, spanning various organisations that are engaged in addressing and preventing child maltreatment, as well as delivering residential care programmes and other child and family welfare initiatives. Among the non-government entities were two residential care programmes, a Child Protection Unit (CPU) and a family violence advocacy organisation. Government-based participants include representatives from residential programmes, law enforcement agencies, the local DSWD and representatives of the Local Council for the Protection of Children (LCPC). Policy actors were also included to offer a national policy perspective on residential care and child protection. Data collection ceased upon achievement of data saturation whereby the study could effectively answer its research question.

Ethical arrangements

The study was approved by a university-based Human Research Ethics Committee. All participants provided written consent. For young people, written and verbal information about the study was available in English and Cebuano, a major dialect in the Philippines. Verbal permission was obtained from carers separately, to minimise the possibility that children would feel coerced. Young participants further provided verbal agreement as part of an assent process (Kendrick et al., 2008). Research participation principles were explained, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, the ability to withdraw at any time, choice around discussion topics and how information would be used. A female interpreter was available for all interviews with young people; however, the majority were conducted in English. Young people received university branded stationery gifts to compensate for their time.

Data collection and analysis

Interviews with children and young people who were living, or previously living in residential care, were primarily intended at exploring their life histories, encompassing their experiences in residential care, significant relationships and suggestions for enhancing such care. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow for the exploration of the interviewee's experiences and broader dialogue, while maintaining focus on the research objectives (Brinkman, 2014). The interviews were designed to gain insights into the experiences, thoughts and feelings of participants (Jentoft and Olsen, 2019). As such, the interviews employed participatory techniques to engage participants, particularly children and young people, encouraging their involvement and reducing communication barriers (Kendrick et al., 2008). Techniques included creating life timelines and relationship maps using paper and markers, as well as reimagining residential care programmes. This combination of traditional and child-centric methods, rather than limiting to child-friendly techniques, prevents participants from feeling patronised (Clark and Statham, 2005), gives them more control over the data collection process and supports their comfort (Kearns, 2014). These also served as a visual aid for both the interviewer and participants that helped maintain focus on key topics. Flexibility was central, with participants given choices regarding the location and timing of the interviews, the use of interpreters and the option to have a support person present. Interviews with all other participants involved semi-structured interviews lasting between 20 and 90 minutes. These interviews primarily focused on their professional roles and experience, and their views of children's welfare programmes in the Philippines, including the characteristics and roles of non-government residential care programmes. No identifying details of participants are reported in the findings.

The audio recordings from interviews were professionally transcribed and uploaded into NVivo data analysis software. A thematic coding process was undertaken by the first author that

prioritised an inductive approach to the development of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Thomas, 2006). This first involved reading the transcripts in full, then identifying themes presenting across the data that corresponded to the research priorities of the study. Analytical rigour was supported via reflexive processes including discussion between researchers, as well as taking notes of impressions and reflections during analysis.

Findings

Transnationalism in RCSs' funding and governance arrangements

Our analysis identified a range of examples of transnational influence and governance in RCSs in the Philippines. This was most clearly illustrated by the significant role of international funding in supporting child and family welfare programmes. Participants explained that non-government RCSs typically rely on transnational funding for the child and family welfare services they provide, including those participating in this study. One programme manager stated that the RCS they were employed at received approximately 98 percent funding from US sources. The origin of transnational funds was diverse, with participants identifying sources of international funding that included the United States, Australia, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands, China, Japan and Korea. Participants noted that international funding was essential, but also indicated situations of financial dependency.

There's a clear need [for transnational funding] because we are totally dependent, I would say, because if you rely on the Philippine government, you know, for shelters and the implementation of programs, we cannot exist without the funding and support from the other countries, especially the US. (P15 – NGO programme manager)

The governance arrangements of RCSs were also highlighted by participants which were, similarly to their financial arrangements, highly transnational. Governance structures frequently involved key leadership roles that were based outside of the Philippines on boards and committees, with leadership and decision-making external to the Philippines-based work of the RCS, which all had been established by international actors. This involvement in decision-making could even include decision-making around individual children and their needs, involving, for example, their schooling and education, decisions around their health, approaches to behaviour management or contact with family. Participants explained that one reason for this is that it is a simple process for international actors to establish an NGO in the Philippines, with limited, although increasing, regulation and a widespread need for NGOs across communities.

The Philippines is probably the most active NGO market in the world. We have NGOs galore [. . .]. This is because the government has been a miserable failure. Someone had to fill in the gap. That's my only explanation. Somebody had to fill in the gap. In a society where government does what it's supposed to do and services the people according to their needs, you wouldn't need all these NGOs. (P25 – NGO programme director)

Forms of religious transnationalism are also apparent in the data with participants noting the religious focus of RCSs that is frequently directed by the international governance structures to promote their religious missions via their child and family welfare work. The Philippines is a highly religious society and faith-based organisations are common across the Philippines. However, participants in this study drew attention to the religious objectives of orphanages being driven by international actors. For example, at one RCS, children in residential care, who are predominantly

sponsored by internationally based sponsors, are required as part of their accommodation and care to participate in religious services and bible study. RCSs also conceptualise their child and family welfare programmes as missionary work.

I think for our donor base and the people that we typically try to reach out to, that emphasising the faith part of the organisation really speaks to them and it's something that they really want to see done, they want to see. [. . .] But I think it sets us apart from others [international NGOs], we're not just meeting their physical needs, we're also meeting their spiritual needs. (P16 – NGO programme manager)

The transnational commodification of children in residential care

The transnational funding context of RCSs in the Philippines influences the objectives of RCSs and their approaches to caring for children. Some policy actor participants understood RCSs as, first and foremost, business entities, highlighting the need for RCSs to create income, and the importance of transnational funding to sustain their models of care. Core to this is the commodification of children and young people, as one participant described:

Opening some orphanages or as we call it a residential shelter, it's a kind of business. I believe that. They will fund raise over there (overseas), and then they have to make sure that they have children, because if there are no children, there is no money to fundraise. (P12 – NGO based social worker)

Interviews revealed that RCSs act to 'commodify' children to varying degrees to support the generation of transnational funding. This could include engaging with volunteers, donors and sponsors involving face-to-face interactions or via communications such as letters, as well as sharing information about them and their lives to prospective sponsors. Face-to-face interactions could include having meals with sponsors, taking sponsors for community visits or social activities with volunteers. Another example was where a young person described touring Australian schools with their INGO with the objective of awareness raising and seeking funding. The commodification described here involved children performing identities of 'orphanhood' and poverty in order to raise funds for their RCS programme.

P: We went to different schools [in Australia] and shared our stories. It was so hard telling our stories . . . we had to tell them over and over again in different schools and I felt frustrated . . . I felt lost and lonely at that time because I saw the different situation of the children here [in the Philippines] and the situation of the children there so why? Why is God so unfair? Why do they live well and the children in the Philippines is not living well?

Q: *What was their reaction to your story? How did they react?*

P: They cried. They cried because they did not realise that 'Oh, you lived like that' like 'we have food every day, we eat three meals everyday but you eat lunch only, dinner only'. Like that, so they see the difference. They became aware that they should not take things for granted. They have everything, some of them have everything maybe. Unlike children here, we have to work to get food, we have to study, finish our study to work. We have to live in an institution to have a family.

Unlike them, they have their family so I think a purpose was to raise awareness so that they become aware, so that they don't take things for granted. So that they should be thankful, grateful for what they have.

Q: So it's about education? Is there any other reason?

P: We raise funds. Because we have to raise funds to support our programs so that we could support children. (YP9 – Young person with RCS experience)

This transnational context shapes children and young people's perceptions of RCSs and their objectives. Children and young people were acutely aware of the origins of funding in their RCSs and the importance of maintaining or increasing international support to sustain their care. This meant that young people viewed international sponsors and donors as central to their well-being, education and future prospects. When asked about their views of sponsors, young people typically described them as generous, loving, helping and supportive. Some viewed sponsors as 'instruments of God', drawing on their religious beliefs to understand the actions and impact of sponsorship in their lives.

But God gave me a way, an instrument, through my sponsor, who looked for me so I could go back and focus on my studies . . . There was a big gap in my life and the sponsor came looking for me [. . .]. (YP21 – Young person with RCS experience)

Another young person living in a RCS described their sponsor as a second family, highlighting how important their financial contributions are to them and their family. International sponsors are interpreted as generous, altruistic and highly responsible for children's well-being and future.

They're like my second family, they pour their love on us, not just me but also my family, little sister, they're supporting my studies. They are not only helping me but also my family, my little sister, they give extra amounts. (YP17 – Young person with RCS experience)

The Philippines' dependence on international funding for child and family welfare

Among participant accounts was a view that transnational welfare provision in the Philippines more generally had characteristics of neocolonial structures and practices, culminating in a dependent relationship on international funding. This related to dependencies on international funding and the lack of capacity of governments to provide adequate social protection and the essential child and family welfare services that NGOs provide. Welfare programme managers explained that without a transnational flow of funding, welfare programmes could not exist, describing this relationship as dependent. Recognising this challenge, a Philippines-based leader in a major INGO explained that their organisation has to use international funding to deliver social services and programmes because multiple levels of the Philippines government's lack of capacity.

. . . The Department of Social Welfare and Development is an overworked, underpaid, undertrained agency whose problems are everybody's problems. I mean disaster, poverty, crime, you name it. Every social malady you have is their concern so children's [welfare and protection] occupy a very low priority [. . .]. We keep saying, 'Never, never take over the function of government unless you have to. Make sure government does its part. Make sure police are resourced, and the children and women's desks get the resources that they need. Make sure that the social workers from DSWD and the City Social Welfare's office get the resources that they need . . .' In some cases it's worked. In many cases it did not, mainly because again, it's a question of resources and priorities. This was never high on the priorities of a lot of politicians. (P25 – NGO programme director)

A relationship of dependency was also conceptualised beyond transnational flows of funding to impacting progress on broader social reforms, with one participant viewing this 'dependent' relationship as a barrier to societal progress:

Dependent, we don't believe in ourselves that we can change our society on our own. We're more dependent on other nations to help us . . . (P10 – NGO social worker)

This entrenched dependency on other countries to support child and family welfare systems was also viewed as a lasting legacy of the Philippines' colonial history whereby the culture, structures and functions of welfare provision were, and continue to be, governed by others.

I think because we're used to receiving help. It relates back to how we were conquered by so many nationalities, how we were in the hands of the Spaniards for the longest time and after the Spaniards came, the Americans came and then the Japanese and then came again, the Americans, who gave us liberation . . . And because oh yeah, 'they'll help us anyway' . . . So that kind of culture has never gotten out of our system. It's right there and it's going to stay there. (P22 – NGO programme manager)

Discussion

The findings provide insights into the organisational arrangements of RCSs in the Philippines and highlight the transnational character of their governance, funding and programmatic approaches. They highlight a significant transnational element, with a number of countries, predominantly from the Global North, heavily involved in the administration, financing and design of these child welfare programmes. Participants characterised these arrangements as a relationship of dependence, stressing the limited role of government in providing social protection and the significant need for the international non-government sector to step in and provide child and family welfare. These arrangements, however, have led to the commodification of children to support and maintain the transnational arrangements and objectives of RCSs. Examples of this include having children interact and communicate with volunteers, donors and sponsors, including touring Global North contexts. Young people's accounts of their lives and experiences of living in RCSs involved an acute awareness of the transnational nature of their care, and they attributed their well-being and future life prospects with the actions of sponsors, donors and the transnational administration of the orphanages in which they are embedded. Indeed, this awareness shapes their understanding of their lives and circumstances, as well as their perspectives on the dynamics and structures of social welfare in the Philippines.

These findings provide a snapshot of RCSs in the Philippines and in doing so detail approaches to children's welfare where characteristics of an 'orphan industrial complex' are present. The economic and cultural interests of international actors located in the Global North are present in the governance and funding arrangements of orphanages, and to some degree, in the design of programmes and decision-making around children's care. The commodification of children is a key indicator of the orphan industrial complex and central in sustaining these forms of welfare programmes. As outlined by Cheney and Ucembe (2019), this practice risks NGOs increasingly expanding the commodification of children to pursue organisational agendas, to incorporate more and more children into their programmes, which can potentially lead to situations of child exploitation and trafficking (Van Doore, 2016). This also hinders the development of more evidence and rights-based approaches to children's welfare, and the phase-out of institutions in favour of family-based care. This 'orphan industrial complex' dynamic also reduces incentives for government to develop stronger social protections to reduce the need and reliance on orphanages and similar programmes, and in turn, reduce reliance on transnational funding of welfare programmes.

Finally, the findings also indicate the ways in which orphanages can be viewed as an example of neocolonialism within contemporary Philippines society. The transnational governance and

funding of orphanages, and the power dynamics they engender, create a situation in which programme characteristics and service delivery comprise a set of subtle and unequal power relations. These are most prominent between actors located in the Global North and local staff, with global hegemonies embedded within these organisational structures and practice. Where governance structures provide Global North actors to make decisions about practice approaches to working with children, or programme design, or decisions about their care and needs, this reduces the agency of local actors. Neocolonial internationalist capitalist structures are evidenced by the financing of orphanages and their funding structures by Global North actors, while the orphanage model of care represents a mode of welfare that is idealised by foreign, Global North actors, rather than one that aligns with the social needs and conditions, and cultural forms of social care in the Philippines context.

This study suggests several ways that these problematic dynamics could be disrupted. A stronger national social welfare system that targets support to children and families, an enlivened deinstitutionalisation policy reform agenda, and stronger implementation of evidence-based approaches to children's welfare, may assist to reduce the reliance on transnational actors to fund and direct welfare provision. Stronger regulation emanating from the Global North could assist to limit the involvement of charities in RCSs in low- and middle-income countries and direct charitable efforts towards family-based care models in line with international best practice. Enhanced regulation of RCS by the Philippines Department of Social Welfare and Development that reviews governance and funding arrangements and incorporates requirements for local leadership and decision-making may support more culturally relevant and effective practices.

Limitations

This study has some methodological limitations to consider when interpreting its findings. The data collected from young people are limited to a small range of non-government RCSs and as such cannot be considered representative of similar programmes across the Philippines, particularly given the country's economic, cultural and geographical diversity. A broader sample, particularly of young people, from other geographical locations with experiences of other RCSs would be highly valuable. In addition, other NGOs to those explored here may have differing governance and funding arrangements. While the findings are contingent and bound to their context, they do add to the broader knowledge of the child and family welfare practices that have emerged in the policy and welfare conditions of the Philippines more broadly.

Conclusion

Non-government residential care programmes form a major response to child maltreatment and related issues amid high levels of social disadvantage and the Philippines' limited social welfare system. This study's findings outline how these programmes are frequently funded, governed and culturally influenced by transnational actors located in the Global North. This results in a dependence on transnational funding and a commodification of children to support these models of care. This signals the transnational character of RCSs in the Philippines and their participation in the orphan industrial complex, as well as how approaches to children's welfare are a contemporary site of problematic neocolonial relations that maintain historically based unequal power relations that work to marginalise the agency, value and cultural expertise of local actors. These dynamics likely hinder the development of improved approaches to children and family welfare.

Future research that systematically identifies the characteristics, functions, interests and scale of transnational actors in the Philippines' child welfare sector would be highly valuable, as would

developing a stronger understanding of the social policy context in which transnational approaches to children's welfare are fostered. The presence of transnational and neocolonial approaches to children's welfare in other low- and middle-income countries is likely. Analysis utilising these theoretical constructs could be applied to these contexts to develop regional or global understanding of these issues and tailor international policy reforms.

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