11.

Rapid Assessment of the Effects of COVID-19 on Poverty and on the Efficacy of the Social Protection Response in the Philippines

Nard Huijbregts, Katharina Bollig*, Julieta Morais*, Anjanette Saguisag†, Rosela Agcaoili†*

11.1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the national poverty rate of the Philippines has consistently decreased, reducing from 23.3 per cent in 2015 to 16.6 per cent in 2018 (PSA, 2019). Pre-COVID-19 poverty projections pointed to a further decline in the upcoming years, showing that even though the economy has recently slowed, the Philippines was still making progress in poverty reduction (Albert et al., 2020; Navarro, Reyes & Francisco, 2020). Moreover, the country had significantly reduced the level of extreme poverty (i.e., the proportion of Filipinos living in households whose income is not enough to meet basic food needs) from 9.1 per cent in 2015 to 5.2 per cent in 2018 (PSA, 2019). Owing to the COVID-19 crisis, however, this trend in poverty reduction is at risk of being reversed.

The Philippines reported its first confirmed case of COVID-19 on 30 January 2020, in the National Capital Region (NCR). On 7 March 2020, the Department of Health reported the first case of community transmission, which resulted in a state of calamity and the introduction of community quarantine in NCR on 15 March 2020. To limit further outbreaks as the coronavirus spread to the country's 81 provinces, national and local governments imposed community quarantines, including the multiple versions of 'enhanced community quarantine' that were implemented in NCR throughout most of 2021. The strict measures and quarantines implemented at different levels of government highlight the

firm stance taken by the Government of the Philippines to contain COVID-19 (Philippine News Agency, n.d.). In February 2022, COVID-19 cases throughout the country started to decline (WHO, 2022).

In addition, measures were put in place to cushion and prevent the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic from hindering the country's recent gains in reducing poverty and improving overall welfare (Philippine News Agency, n.d.). In April 2020, the Government launched the Social Amelioration Program (SAP), as part of which an emergency subsidy was delivered to low-income households, with the Department of Social Welfare and Development acting as the key implementing agency. SAP provided cash assistance to existing beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in addition to newly affected households – including informal workers and other vulnerable groups – targeted through local government units.

The emergency subsidy delivered by SAP amounted to between PHP 5,000 and 8,000 (USD89–142). The benefit was delivered in two rounds in 2020. The first round, implemented throughout May, June and July 2020, reached 17.6 million households, including 4.3 million 4Ps beneficiary households and 13.3 million low income, non-4Ps households. In total, more than PHP 99 billion, or 0.56 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), was spent during the first round of SAP (DSWD, 2020). The second round, implemented from August 2020 onwards, targeted 13.8 million households: 1.3 million 4Ps beneficiary households and 7.2 million non-4Ps households living in enhanced community quarantine areas, plus 5.3 million families nationwide on the waiting list for SAP, which did not receive the first instalment of the emergency subsidy (UNICEF, 2021).

11.2. RESEARCH METHODS

The three research studies used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods.

11.2.1. Assessment of socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in NCR

The assessment of the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in NCR derives from a large, quantitative phone survey with 3,625 households with children residing in the region, conducted during the period 17–27 September 2020. The survey respondents were recruited through Facebook adverts and post-stratification weights based on the 2015 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) data were used to correct potential differences between the sample and the target population to guarantee a representative NCR sample. Additionally, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with households that had participated in the quantitative phone survey. Interviewees were purposively selected to include

households with a pregnant woman, a child under 1 year of age, a household member with disability, an overseas foreign worker, a child who had suffered violence or a household member who had experienced COVID-19 symptoms. Findings from the primary data collection were complemented with data from the country's 2018 FIES and 2017 Demographic and Health Survey, which were analysed to put into context and triangulate findings from the primary data collection.

11.2.2. Ex ante microsimulation of effects of COVID-19 on child poverty

The second study conducted a scenario-based microsimulation to estimate the direct impacts of COVID-19 on monetary and multidimensional poverty – specifically child poverty – in the Philippines. The simulations were built around three scenarios of income contraction resulting from the pandemic (10 per cent, 20 per cent and 30 per cent) and thereupon estimated the effects of COVID-19 on poverty in the country. Furthermore, the microsimulation estimated the impacts of SAP and its efficacy in tackling the increase in poverty caused by the pandemic. The quantitative model was built on data from the most recent FIES and Labour Force Survey datasets. For the analysis of the effects of COVID-19 on multidimensional child poverty, the analysis relied on the Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis methodology, assessing children's deprivations in the dimensions of water, sanitation and housing; child violence; education; health; and food poverty (UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, n.d.). The lack of quantitative data for many of these dimensions meant that the quantitative model had to be complemented by qualitative data. Thus, no single multidimensional poverty index could be created; instead, analysis was carried out separately for each dimension.

11.2.3. Ex post qualitative assessment of the effects of COVID-19 on child poverty, and of the efficacy of the social protection response

The third study was a qualitative assessment of the effects of COVID-19 on child poverty, and of the efficacy of the emergency subsidy delivered by SAP to alleviate these effects. For the assessment, primary qualitative data were collected in six regions of the Philippines: Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Eastern Visayas, Ilocos, NCR, Soccsksargen and Western Visayas. To gather information about the implementation efficacy of SAP and how future shock response programmes could be improved, 108 key informant interviews were conducted with government officials at national, regional and *barangay* (local) levels and with development partners and *barangay* health workers. Additionally, 300 household interviews (50 per region) were

carried out with households that had benefited from 4Ps and SAP, or from SAP only, and with households that had applied for SAP but had not qualified for the programme. Households were sampled purposively according to several sampling criteria, including having children and/or pregnant or lactating women, having more than five members and/or being headed by a female. The interviews were designed to gather information about household experiences of COVID-19 containment measures, including, but not limited to, receiving the SAP benefit.

11.3. OBJECTIVE AND RESULTS

The main objectives of the three studies were aligned and partially overlapping and can be summarized as follows: (1) to assess the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures on households in the Philippines, focusing especially on the effects of COVID-19 on poverty and child poverty; (2) to assess the efficacy of SAP – introduced by the Government of the Philippines as the primary social protection response to COVID-19 – in cushioning these effects; and (3) to provide recommendations on relevant policy responses.

## 11.4. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MONETARY POVERTY IN THE PHILIPPINES

In 2018, pre-COVID-19, the poverty rate in the Philippines was estimated at 16.6 per cent, with approximately 18.3 million people living in poverty (Philippine Statistics Authority, n.d.). The COVID-19 pandemic is likely, however, to have increased the country's poverty rate. The ex ante microsimulation found that had the Government not introduced any measures to cushion the effects of COVID-19, the national monetary poverty rate would have increased by 4.6 to 17.6 percentage points, resulting in a poverty rate of 21.2 per cent in the best case scenario or 34.2 per cent in the worst case scenario. Estimates suggest that rural poverty rates would have increased to between 32.2 and 48.8 per cent, while urban poverty rates would have increased to between 11.1 and 20.9 per cent. Zooming in on BARMM, estimates of post-COVID-19 poverty rates indicate an incidence of 66.9 per cent in the best case scenario and 82.1 per cent in the worst case scenario, representing a potential increase of 8.4 to 23.6 percentage points on the pre-COVID-19 poverty rate of 58.5 per cent (*see Table 11.1*).

Table 11.1 Poverty headcount and poverty rate pre- and post-COVID-19

Poverty headcount/rate (without SAP)	Pre-COVID-19	Best case scenario	Medium scenario	Worst case scenario
National	18,260,000 16.6%	23,342,000 21.2%	29,898,000 27.2%	37,642,000 34.2%
Urban	4,270,068 8.2%	5,764,592 11.1%	8,050,640 15.5%	10,893,881 20.9%
Rural	14,904,360 25.7%	18,669,550 32.2%	23,170,400 40.0%	28,250,510 48.8%
BARMM	2,212,111 58.5%	2,530,882 66.9%	2,834,150 75.0%	3,105,275 82.1%

Source: (PSA, 2018), author's calculations.

The ex ante microsimulation also shows that the COVID-19 pandemic likely exacerbated the already precarious situation of Philippine children. Modelling results indicate that with no social protection response from the Government, the monetary child poverty rate would have increased by 5.9 to 21.5 percentage points – reaching 29.9 per cent in the best case scenario and 45.5 per cent in the worst case scenario. The microsimulation further found a significant difference in child poverty between urban and rural areas, with post-COVID-19 child poverty rates potentially reaching 60.5 per cent in rural areas versus 30.2 per cent in urban areas for the worst case scenario (*see Figure 11.1*). Moreover, children in BARMM were found to be more vulnerable than children nationwide, with the region's child poverty rate potentially reaching between 73.7 and 87.1 per cent – an increase of 15.2 to 28.6 percentage points on the region's pre-COVID-19 poverty rate of 58.5 per cent.

Figure 11.1 Child poverty rates post-COVID-19, different scenarios
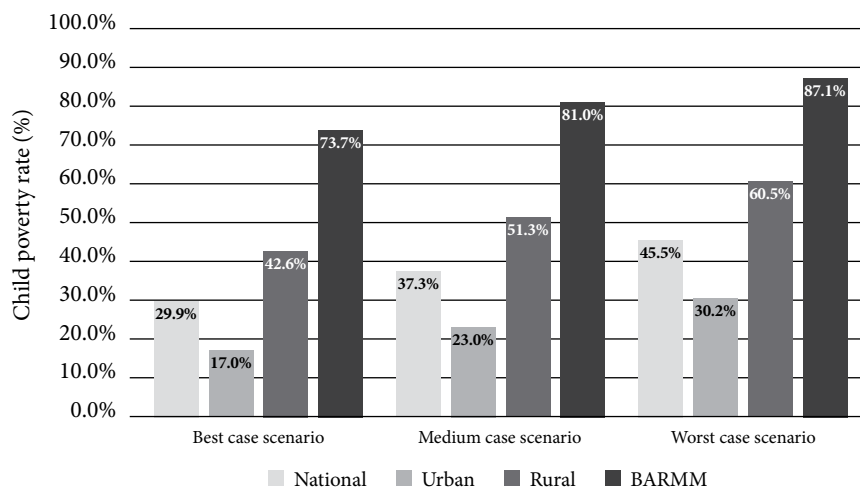
Source: (PSA, 2018), authors' calculations.

The findings from the ex ante microsimulation were complemented and validated by primary data collected through the quantitative phone survey in NCR. Survey findings indicate that households relied on coping strategies to make up for income losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures. When asked how they were coping with the financial effects of the COVID-19 crisis, most respondents mentioned cutting out all non-essential expenditures. Other respondents mentioned borrowing as a coping strategy, especially by buying items on credit from *sari-sari* stores (neighbourhood shops) and by using informal money lenders. Several households reported reducing food consumption or changing the types of food consumed, for example, eating less meat or purchasing cheaper vegetables. Many households reported attempting to make and sell goods on the street, while a few households mentioned attempting to sell assets. Importantly, child labour did not appear to be a major coping strategy among survey respondents – only 2 per cent of children aged 5–17 years were reported as having worked in the past six months.

11.5. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY IN THE PHILIPPINES

Monetary poverty alone cannot fully capture the dire situation of the most vulnerable proportion of the population. Thus, the study expanded its assessment to include a multidimensional perspective, looking at the dimensions of water, sanitation and housing; child violence; education; health; and food poverty.

11.5.1. Water, sanitation and housing

For the dimension of water, sanitation and housing, a review of secondary sources indicates that an extreme economic crisis could, in the long run, potentially cause dislocation, forcing households to move into lodgings without access to safe drinking water or proper sanitation facilities. As of mid-2022, however, no evidence of such an impact of the COVID-19 crisis has been recorded for the Philippines, despite the increase in the level of monetary poverty. At a policy level, the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed and strengthened a joint commitment by the Department of Education and the Department of Health to promote handwashing in schools and communities, together with other hygiene measures, to reduce disease transmission in public settings. This commitment is likely to result in better access to water, sanitation and hygiene for children and communities in the Philippines in the future (UNICEF, 2021).

11.5.2. Child violence

In terms of child violence, a review of secondary sources demonstrates that violence against children is widespread in the Philippines and remains a harsh reality for millions of the country's children. Studies have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic increased children's exposure to violence, including sexual violence, physical violence and emotional maltreatment. The Office of Cybercrime (Department of Justice) has stated that 279,166 cases of child sexual abuse were reported from 1 March to 24 May 2020, compared with 76,561 cases over the same period in 2019. Furthermore, cases of internet-based sexual exploitation of children saw a year-on-year increase of 264 per cent for the same period (Save the Children, n.d.). The increase in the incidence of child abuse has been corroborated by the data collected via the phone survey with households in NCR. Approximately half of the children aged 12–14 years in the survey sample had survived physical or emotional violence: 47 per cent had been subjected to a form of abuse; out of which 43 per cent had been shouted or yelled at and 15 per cent had been beaten or spanked.

11.5.3. Education

On the dimension of education, according to the NCR phone survey results, households expressed concerns about their children's education, especially regarding the shift to remote learning. With home study continuing for more than 18 months, the Philippines was one of the last countries in the world to reopen its schools, which took place in November 2021. Towards the end of 2020, parents and caregivers had already raised concerns about not having enough money for internet connectivity, about the lack of internet-enabled devices and about being unable to properly assist their children with their schoolwork (UNICEF & UNDP, 2020). Moreover, the results from the ex ante microsimulation on

the impacts of COVID-19 on poverty suggest a potential surge in secondary school dropout throughout the school year 2021/22. The modelling estimates that 179,565 to 684,837 children could drop out of secondary school nationwide, depending on the severity of the scenario regarding household income losses due to the pandemic. This would be a 1.5 to 5.9 per cent drop in secondary school enrolment vis-à-vis the pervious school year of 2019/20. Zooming in on BARMM, the situation is predicted to be even more concerning, as school enrolment levels pre-COVID-19 were significantly lower than the national average. As a result of the projected poverty increase in BARMM, the modelling estimates that 2,241 to 6,280 secondary school students could drop out during the school year 2021/22, depending on the severity of the scenario regarding household income losses.

11.5.4. Health

Regarding the dimension of health, findings from the NCR phone survey exemplify the severe impacts of COVID-19 on household health outcomes. For instance, pregnant women are receiving fewer antenatal care check-ups since the pandemic began: According to the NCR survey, only 61 per cent of pregnant respondents were on track to receive four antenatal care contacts by their due date, compared with 99 per cent of pregnant women in the Philippines pre-COVID-19 (World Health Organization, 2020). Further findings from the NCR survey indicate that pregnant women are less likely to take iron and folic acid tablets as a result of the pandemic: Only 83 per cent of pregnant respondents were taking iron and folic acid tablets at the time of the data collection, compared with 92 per cent of pregnant women in the Philippines before the pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). Nonetheless, the breastfeeding rate and the share of women delivering at a health facility appear to be unchanged.

Moreover, according to results from the ex ante microsimulation, underweight prevalence may see an immediate increase of between 0.03 and 0.08 per cent, depending on the severity of the scenario. Further, as an immediate impact, wasting may increase by between 0.03 and 0.1 per cent. The figures thus indicate a modest increase in the additional share of children under 5 years of age who are affected by underweight or wasting. Considering that pre-COVID-19 levels of malnutrition in the Philippines are already concerning, any increase could have long-lasting detrimental effects on child development. The negative impacts of COVID-19 on children's health are exacerbated by the small share of children under 5 years of age visiting a health facility since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. Responses from the NCR phone survey reveal that at the time the data were collected, only 13 per cent of children under 5 years among the surveyed households had visited a health facility during the pandemic.

11.5.5. Food poverty

In terms of food poverty, findings from the ex ante microsimulation indicate that estimates of the post-COVID-19 national food poverty rate show an increase of 7.8 per cent in the best case scenario and 16.7 per cent in the worst case scenario – representing an increase of 2.5 to 11.4 percentage points on the pre-COVID-19 food poverty rate of 5.3 per cent. From best to worst case scenario, the post-COVID-19 rural food poverty rate is estimated to range from 12.6 per cent to 25.9 per cent, while the urban food poverty rate is likely to range from 3.4 per cent to 8.2 per cent (*see Figure 11.2*).

Zooming in on BARMM, the post-COVID-19 scenario is even more alarming. The ex ante microsimulation suggests that the food poverty rate in BARMM likely increased to 34.2 per cent (1.3 million people) in the best case scenario and 58.7 per cent (2.2 million people) in the worst case scenario. While the pre-COVID-19 food poverty rate in BARMM was 19.3 percentage points higher than the national food poverty rate, post-COVID-19, this gap could increase to 26.4 percentage points, and this is in the best case scenario.

Figure 11.2 Food poverty rates, pre- and post-COVID-19
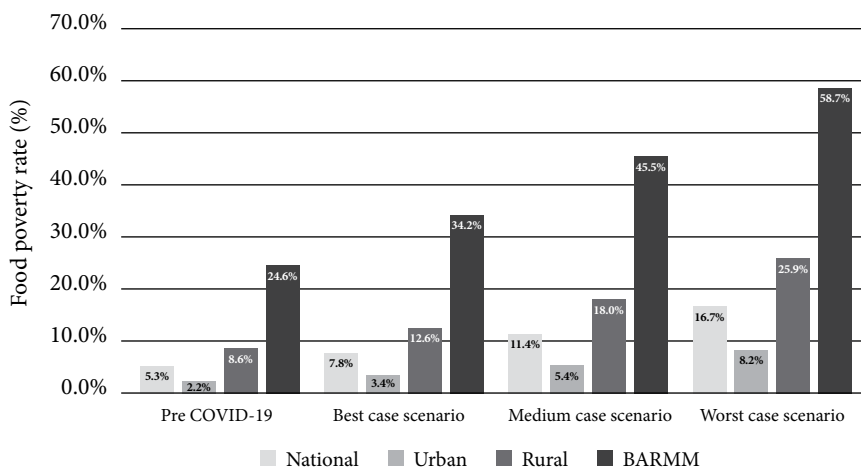
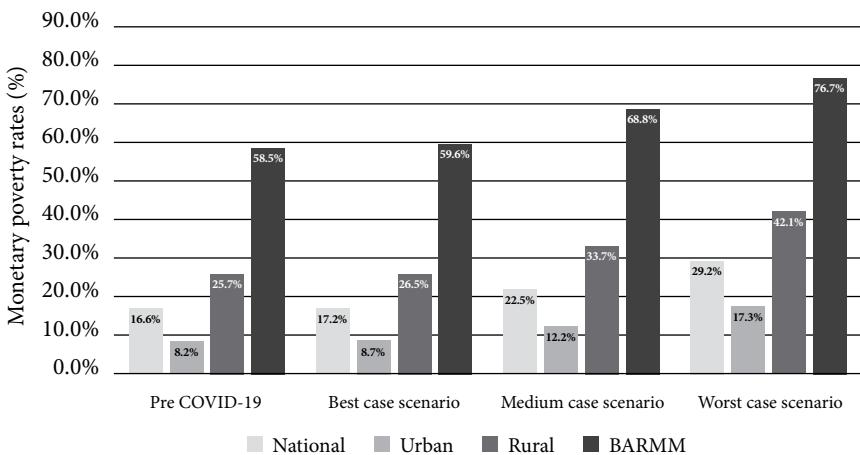Source: (PSA, 2018), authors' calculations.

11.6. EFFICACY OF SAP AS A RESPONSE TO COVID-19

As a rapid response to the COVID-19 emergency, the Government of the Philippines launched the Social Amelioration Program (SAP), which has been perceived as the most important social protection measure implemented in the country to alleviate the negative impacts of COVID-19. The emergency subsidy to low-income households aimed to reduce monetary poverty that varied by region, further contributing to positive outcomes across multidimensional poverty indicators such as education, and food poverty.

11.6.1. Effects of SAP on monetary poverty

Through the provision of an emergency subsidy, SAP aimed to alleviate the impacts of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable and poor households. Results from the ex ante microsimulation indicate that the introduction of the SAP benefit most likely exhibited poverty reduction effects. In the best case scenario, SAP could have reduced poverty by 4.4 percentage points (4.8 million people) in comparison to the estimated post-COVID-19 monetary poverty rate in the absence of SAP. This effect differs between urban and rural areas, with likely a bigger reduction in rural areas (6.3 percentage points) than in urban areas (2.6 percentage points). Zooming in on BARMM, the simulation estimates that SAP promoted poverty reduction of between 5.4 and 7.3 percentage points, depending on the severity of the scenario (*see Figure 11.3*).

Figure 11.3 Monetary poverty rates pre- and post-COVID-19, with SAP

Source: (PSA, 2018), authors' calculations.

The ex ante microsimulation also reveals that the introduction of SAP probably led to a reduction in child poverty. Comparing post-COVID-19 estimates of the national child poverty rate with and without SAP shows that in the best case scenario, SAP likely reduced the child poverty rate from 29.9 to 24.5 per cent, and in the worst case scenario, from 45.5 to 39.1 per cent (*see Figure 11.4*). Nevertheless, in all three scenarios, the proportion of children living in poverty post-COVID-19 versus before the pandemic likely increased, by between 0.5 and 15 percentage points depending on the severity of the scenario. For BARMM, the modelling shows that SAP achieved an even more significant poverty reduction, with an average reduction in the region's child poverty rate of 5.4 percentage points across the three scenarios.

Figure 11.4 National child poverty rate post-COVID-19, with and without SAP
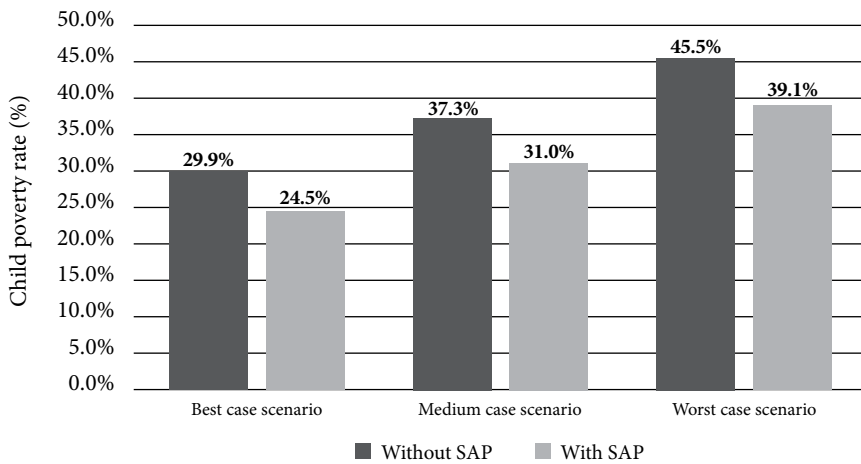
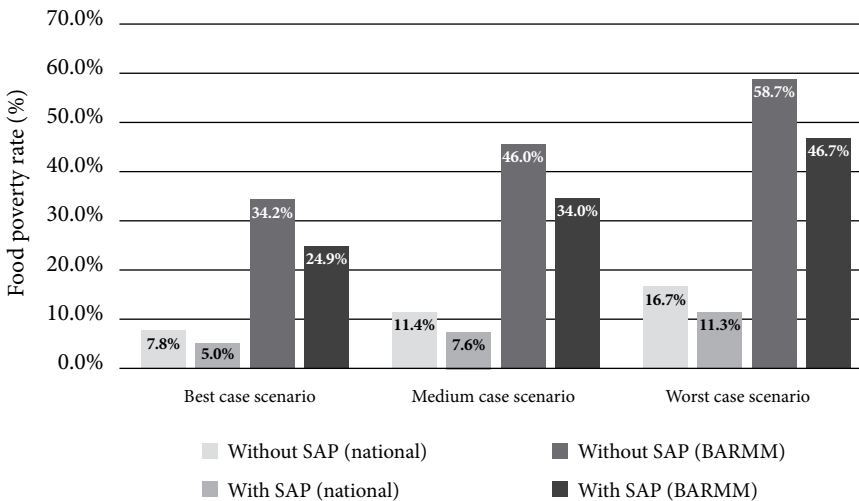Source: (PSA, 2018), authors' calculations.

Despite the positive impacts of SAP in alleviating the consequences of COVID-19, findings from the qualitative assessment indicate that SAP could likely not make up for income losses sustained throughout the pandemic nor alleviate the associated coping strategies adopted by households. Hence, even with the additional income provided by SAP, almost all households in the study reported needing to make substantial cuts in household spending. For instance, respondents reported cutting back on food expenses, choosing cheaper and less preferred foods, reducing meal sizes, and skipping meals to ensure that the children in the household had food to eat.

11.6.2. Effects of SAP on multidimensional poverty

Results from the ex ante microsimulation also indicate that the introduction of the SAP benefit alleviated overall food poverty. Comparing post-COVID-19 estimates of food poverty rates with and without SAP suggests that in the best case scenario, SAP reduced the national food poverty rate by 2.8 percentage points – equivalent to taking roughly 3 million people out of food poverty. For the medium and worst case scenarios, the reduction in the national food poverty rate due to SAP was estimated at 3.9 and 5.4 percentage points respectively (*see Figure 11.5*). For BARMM, the ex ante microsimulation demonstrates that SAP likely reduced food poverty by an average of 10.8 percentage points across all three scenarios. Still, despite the additional income provided by the SAP benefit, the number of people living below the food poverty line was estimated to have increased post-COVID-19 compared with before the pandemic.

This increase in food poverty is particularly harmful to pregnant and lactating women and to children under 2 years of age. The qualitative assessment shows that despite households prioritizing children's food needs, concerns were still raised about some children growing visibly thinner during the pandemic. While DSWD's already existent Supplementary Feeding Programme (SFP) supported households to provide adequate nutrition to children, this programme was limited in coverage to children enrolled in day care and it excluded households with older children.

**Figure 11.5 Post-COVID-19 food poverty rates, with and without SAP**

Source: (PSA, 2018), authors' calculations.

The ex ante microsimulation also zoomed in on the effects of SAP on education outcomes. The modelling suggests that the SAP benefit positively affected the national secondary school dropout rate, reducing dropout by 0.1 to 5.2 per cent, depending on the severity of the scenario. In BARMM, these effects were estimated to be less pronounced, with a probable reduction in secondary school dropout of 0.9 percentage points (1,949 students) in the best case scenario and 0.7 percentage points (1,516 students) in the worst case scenario.

Despite the estimated positive effects of SAP on secondary school dropout rates and overall high enrolment levels nationwide throughout the pandemic, learning outcomes for children are likely to be affected by COVID-19. Results from the qualitative assessment indicate that almost all households reported finding that their children had struggled with the shift to online learning. Findings also point to parents/caregivers struggling with the school closures and the shift to online classes, which put additional pressure on them. As a result, parents and caregivers reported spending more of their time on education support and childcare, reducing their income-generating potential – a situation found to particularly affect women and single parents. According to interview findings from the qualitative assessment, single parents were the worst off in the study sample – especially those who did not receive SAP – as they either had to compromise on childcare or borrow money to sustain their family through the pandemic.

Lastly, the ex ante microsimulation assessed the effects of SAP on inequality indicators. Results show that the introduction of SAP likely contributed to reducing inequality in the Philippines by a maximum of 0.06 points, compared with post-COVID-19 estimates without SAP. In all three scenarios, the post-COVID-19 national Gini coefficient with the SAP benefit – standing at 0.394 in the best case scenario and 0.388 in the worst case scenario – was estimated to be lower than the post-COVID-19 national Gini coefficient without SAP (*see Figure 11.6*).

Figure 11.6 Post-COVID-19 national Gini coefficient, with and without SAP
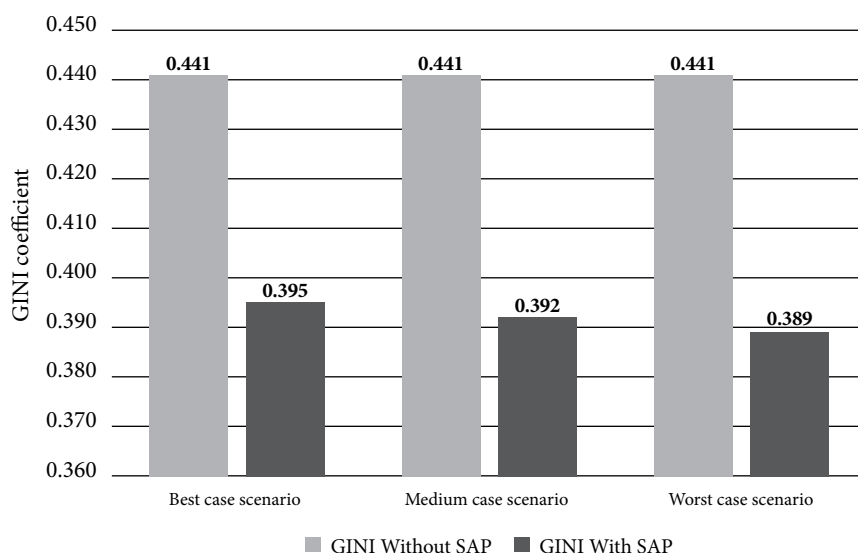
Source: (PSA, 2018), authors' calculations.

11.7. USE AND POLICY IMPACT OF THE EVIDENCE GENERATED

The various studies were the first of their kind within the context of an unfolding pandemic, providing in-depth assessments of the effects of COVID-19 on monetary and multidimensional poverty and child poverty in the Philippines. The combined results of all three studies were thus highly relevant in advocating for shock-responsive social protection for children and their families. The studies put forward policy and programme options to help the most vulnerable households to recover from the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. Most importantly, considering that the COVID-19 crisis has lasted longer than originally expected, the various projections in the ex ante microsimulation provide policymakers with valuable insights to plan ahead as the COVID-19 crisis continues to evolve.

Each of the research studies developed a methodology for data collection to rapidly assess the socio-economic impacts of a shock in the context of a global public health pandemic. As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded worldwide and in the Philippines, the studies provided early assessments and much-needed evidence on the likely impacts of COVID-19. The studies highlight the relevance of timely data collection to assess an emergency situation and inform effective policy and programme responses, once again stressing the need for governments

to invest in rapid data collection systems. The methodology applied by the NCR phone survey serves as a good practice on how to generate a representative quantitative sample, despite the absence of robust sampling. This methodology could be replicated by future studies assessing the impacts of COVID-19 on other regions of the Philippines. The use of Facebook adverts to recruit survey respondents can be applied nationwide, as the Philippines has over 74 million Facebook users, and this recruitment technique has proven effective in past studies. Lastly, post-stratification weights based on the 2015 FIES data to correct potential differences between the sample and the target population can also be applied beyond NCR to guarantee representative samples.

The evidence generated can be used to inform immediate response, as well as recovery and resilience. Aside from assessing the current impacts of COVID-19 at the household level, the research also provides projections of possible scenarios, thereby enabling governments to plan ahead and consider various policy options and contingency plans. The ex ante microsimulation presents five costed policy options that could help to better mitigate the socio-economic effects of COVID-19. The policy options could also be applied to other shocks and emergencies. The first two options are expansions of SAP – a nationwide two-month extension of the programme or a four-month extension exclusively in BARMM. Furthermore, three additional options, focused on assisting children, are presented. These are the provision of a monthly child grant of PHP 500 per child for children under 2 years of age; the provision of an emergency school grant of PHP 1,200 per child for children aged 5–17 years; and the expansion of 4Ps to also include those with an income of no more than 15 per cent above the current poverty threshold. To better inform policymaking, cost estimates are given for each option (*see Table 11.2*).

Table 11.2 Overview of recommended policy options, including cost estimates

Policy option	No. of beneficiaries	Average total benefit, per beneficiary (PHP)	Total cost (USD, millions)	Total cost (PHP, millions)	% GDP
Two-month extension of SAP	17,457,073	13,000	4,674	226,942	1.17
Four-month extension of SAP (BARMM only)	3,633,159	13,000	973	47,231	0.24
Child grant	6,581,131	6,000	813	39,487	0.20
Emergency school grant	27,908,598	1,200	690	33,490	0.17
4Ps expansion	3,704,139	14,000	1,068	51,858	0.27

Source: authors' calculations.

Moreover, results from the ex ante microsimulation support the recommended policy options, showing that all options can further mitigate the effects of COVID-19 (*see Table 11.3*). For instance, a two-month extension of SAP nation-wide (policy option 1) would promote a reduction of the national poverty rate from 34.2 per cent to 24.1 per cent – a reduction of 10.1 percentage points – even in the worst case scenario. Policy option 2, a four-month extension of SAP in BARMM, would decrease the region's poverty rate by 19.5 percentage points in the worst case scenario to 23.8 percentage points in the best case scenario. Policy option 5, the expansion of 4Ps, could promote a reduction of the near-poverty rate (i.e., people living just above the poverty line) by 2.9 percentage points in the worst case scenario to 3.5 percentage points in the best case scenario.

Looking at child transfers specifically, the introduction of a child grant for children under 2 years of age (policy option 3) could promote a significant reduction in child poverty for children aged 0–2 – in the worst case scenario a reduction from 45.9 per cent to 24 per cent and in the best case scenario a reduction from 30.6 per cent to 12.4 per cent. Also the introduction of an emergency school grant (policy option 4) has the potential to reduce child poverty for children aged 5–17 – in the worst case scenario from 45.5 per cent to 38 per cent and in the best case scenario from 29.9 percent to 23.3 per cent.

Table 11.3 Overall impacts of the various recommended policy options

Policy option 1: *Two-month expansion of SAP, nation-wide*	**National poverty rate (%)**	**Best case scenario**	**Medium scenario**	**Worst case scenario**
	Without SAP	21.2	27.2	34.2
	With SAP	16.8	21.8	28.4
	With SAP extension	10.6	18.2	24.1
Policy option 2: *Four-month expansion of SAP only in BARMM*	**BARMM poverty rate (%)**	**Best case scenario**	**Medium scenario**	**Worst case scenario**
	Without SAP	66.9	74.9	82.1
	With SAP	59.6	68.7	76.7
	With SAP extension	43.1	52.6	62.6
Policy option 3: ***Child grant (for children aged 0–2 years)***	**Child poverty rate (%), 0–2 years age group**	**Best case scenario**	**Medium scenario**	**Worst case scenario**
	Without SAP	30.6	37.9	45.9
	With SAP	25.0	31.6	39.6
	With child grant	12.4	17.4	24.0

Policy option 4:	Child poverty rate (%), 5–17 years age group	Best case scenario	Medium scenario	Worst case scenario
Emergency school grant (for children aged 5–17 years)	Without SAP	29.9	37.3	45.5
	With SAP	24.5	30.9	39.1
	With school grant	23.2	29.9	38.0
Policy option 5:	National near-poverty rate (%)	Best case scenario	Medium scenario	Worst case scenario
4Ps expansion	Without SAP	7.1	7.4	7.6
	With SAP	6.8	7.6	8.0
	With 4Ps expansion	3.6	4.2	4.7

Source: (PSA, 2018), author's calculations.

11.8. CONCLUSION

The studies suggest that the COVID-19 crisis has had far-reaching impacts on Philippine households, affecting their incomes and the well-being of families, especially women and children. While the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) played a vital role in providing temporary relief for beneficiary households, it could not make up for income losses sustained throughout the pandemic nor alleviate the associated coping strategies adopted by households. From the perspective of child poverty, children's health and education outcomes were directly affected – perhaps permanently – by the inadequacy of the social protection assistance and by the shift to remote learning.

Hence, there remains an urgent need to provide additional assistance to help families in the Philippines to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This makes a case for expanding social protection programmes and, in the process of doing so, making the social protection programmes more shock-responsive. The Government of the Philippines should continue to leverage existing social protection programmes and systems to ease the levels of food insecurity and income losses experienced due to the pandemic and extended quarantines. To continue to leverage the existing systems, the Government will need to continue to build and strengthen organizational capacity, particularly in local government units and *barangays*. Also, with near-poor and even medium-income households affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, vulnerability measures should be updated to reduce emergency response exclusion errors. Lastly, investing in timely and continuous data collection processes can help to ensure that programmes are implemented at a reliable quality and that adequate support reaches the most vulnerable.

11.9. REFERENCES

Albert, J. R., Abrigo, M. R., Quimba, F. M., and Vizmanos, J. F., 'Poverty, the Middle Class, and Income Distribution amid COVID-19', Philippine Institute for Development Studies, Quezon City, 2020.

Department of Social Welfare and Development, 'DSWD Social Amelioration Program/Emergency Subsidy Program (as of August 2020)', DSWD, Manila, 2020. Available at: <https://transparency.dswd.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/DSWD-SAP-ESP-Beneficiaries-2020.pdf>, accessed 17 May 2021.

Department of Social Welfare and Development, 'Tableau SAP (2020, December 09)', DSWD, 2020. Available at: <https://public.tableau.com/views/SAPMonitoringDashboardforEmergencySubsidyunderAICS/Dashboard1?:display_count=no&:showVizHome=no>, accessed 17 May 2021.

Navarro, A., Reyes, C., and Francisco, K., 'UN Common Country Assessment Update for the Philippines', Philippine Institute for Development Studies, Quezon City, 2020.

Philippines News Agency, 'Anti-COVID-19 Pandemic news clips'. Available at: <https://www.pna.gov.ph/categories/anti-covid-19-pandemic>, accessed 17 May 2021.

Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), 'Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) 2018', PSA, Manila, 2018.

Philippine Statistics Authority, 'Proportion of Poor Filipinos was Estimated at 16.6 Percent in 2018 (2019, December 6)'. Available at: <https://psa.gov.ph/content/proportion-poor-filipinos-was-estimated-166-percent-2018>, accessed 17 May 2021.

Philippine Statistics Authority, 'Statistics, Latest Releases', 2020. Available at: <https://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases>, accessed 17 May 2021.

Save the Children, 'Lessons from the Philippines: Save the Best for Children Under the Uncertainties of COVID-19', 2020. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org.ph/our-work/our-stories/story/save-the-best-for-children-under-the-uncertainties-of-covid-19/>, accessed 17 May 2021.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Households in the National Capital Region of the Philippines', UNICEF and UNDP, Manila, 2020.

United Nations Children's Fund, 'Sanitation targets are off-track: DOH, WHO and UNICEF ask local governments to invest in sanitation (2020, 11 19)'. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/sanitation-targets-are-track-doh-who-and-unicef-ask-local-governments-invest>, accessed 17 May 2021.

United Nations Children's Fund, 'Rapid assessment of COVID-19's effect on child poverty and efficacy of social protection responses', UNICEF Philippines, Manila, 2021.

UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti, 'Multidimensional Overlapping Deprivation Analysis (MODA)', 2021. Available at: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/multidimensional-overlapping-deprivation-analysis-moda-201–2015/>, accessed 17 May 2021.

World Health Organization, 'New Guidelines on Antenatal Care for Positive Pregnancy Experience (2020, November 01)'. Available at: <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/news/antenatal-care/en/>, accessed 1 November 2020.

World Health Organization, 'Philippines (2022, June 2)'. Retrieved from Health Emergency Dashboard. Available at: <https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/ph>

World Bank, 'DepEd, DOH commit to create culture of handwashing in schools and communities amid COVID-19 pandemic (2021, October 15)'. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/deped-doh-commit-create-culture-handwashing-schools-and-communities-amid-covid-19>, accessed on 26 October 2022.