

THE OSY PANDEMIC: THE RISING NUMBER OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

by:

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There is a rising pandemic, and this is not affecting our health, nor does it is killing people. But this pandemic, if unattended, will kill the dreams of millions of Filipino young people.

In a report by USAID (2021) entitled “The Impact of COVID-19 on Opportunities for Out-of-School Youth in the Philippines,”, the agency revealed that out-of-school-youth (OSY) in the country increased to 25.2% in April 2020 from just 16.9% in January 2020. The report also said that at least three million Filipinos between the ages of 16 and 24 are either not in school or have not finished college or post-secondary education. The study also strongly claimed that OSY correlates with poverty because these three million OSYs belong to the bottom 30% based on per capita income.

Inquirer (2022) reported that the pandemic has worsened the number of OSYs in the country as more children dropped as even if classrooms have already re-opened for in-person classes. Reports indicate that at least 1.1 million students did not sign up for the school year 2020-2021. One reason was that they did not have access to the internet.

Children who will not be able to complete formal schooling are prone to having low quality of life, a lack of life skills and social skills, and behavior problems. Those who do not begin or finish their education will face serious repercussions. Children and teenagers who don't go to school or who leave before they're done lose out on important developmental milestones and essential knowledge about health and other topics. These

young people are more susceptible to the influence of disinformation spread by untrustworthy sources.

The OSYs need our attention too. While there are already institutionalized mechanisms to address the OSY problem, the Department of Education needs all the help it can get to help our OSYs get an education and improve their futures. Youth Power (2022) recommended some interventions to address the rising number of OSYs. One among these is strengthening our conditional cash transfer program or the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program. Another is to address gender-based barriers to education, ensuring that schools are safe, particularly during this pandemic time, providing a clear transition between education and employment opportunities, identifying, and specifically targeting both at-risk and especially vulnerable youth, and providing alternative means of continuing education through non-formal education programs.

We hold dear what our national hero Jose Rizal declared: “The youth is the hope of our Fatherland.” They are our future, and they will be the ones leading our country in the future. An investment we make in education is an investment for the future. An investment for the future is an investment for eternity. Let us not allow this “pandemic” to destroy the future of the Filipino youth.

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