

## AN INDEX ON DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATION LEARNERS OF GENERAL MAXIMINO HIZON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

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### ABSTRACT

Disaster Risk Reduction is one of the most important deliberations globally. It is deemed important that everyone adheres to the Philippine government mandates in its Republic Act 10121- Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed the close link between health and disaster risk reduction (UNDRR, 2021). With the aim to achieve the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, our school designed an Index on Disaster Preparedness that geared toward empowering the 4 Pillars of Disaster Risk Reduction with better understanding among our most vulnerable learners and their families. This descriptive research features the Index designed on Disaster Preparedness among Special Education learners of General Maximino Hizon Elementary School in the time of Covid-19 is a program initiative inspired by the School Disaster Risk Reduction Management and was designed explicitly for the learners with disabilities and their families. Eighty-seven (87) learners with disabilities and their families attended a webinar that highlights and enhance the integration of disaster risk reduction on building resiliency, stewardship, and empathy towards a safe, adaptive, disaster-ready families and communities; manage health and related risks including for disease outbreaks, which is a key example of a multi-sectoral approach to disaster risk management.

**Keywords:** Disaster Risk Reduction, Special Education, Learners with Disabilities, Parents of Learners with Disabilities

## **1. Introduction**

The Philippines' geographical location is prone to multiple hazards. The government adheres to adopt the universal norms, principles and standards and expressed the country's commitment to overcome human sufferings due to recurring disasters. With its Republic Act No. 10121 also known as the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010 (PDRRM Act of 2020) promulgated to prescribe the manner, procedures and guidelines for the implementation of the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction And Management (PDRRM) Act of 2010, to facilitate compliance and achieve the objectives such as adopting a disaster risk reduction and management approach that is holistic, comprehensive, integrated, and proactive in lessening the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of disasters including climate change, and promote the involvement and participation of all sectors and all stakeholders concerned, at all levels, especially the local community. Its objective in developing, promoting and implementing a comprehensive National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan (NDRRMP) that aims to strengthen the capacity of the national government and the local government units (LGUs), together with partner stakeholders, to build the disaster resilience of communities, and - to institutionalize arrangements and measures for reducing disaster risks, including projected climate risks, and enhancing disaster preparedness and response capabilities at all levels. Ensuring that disaster risk reduction and climate change measures are gender responsive, sensitive to indigenous knowledge systems and cultures, and respectful of human rights.

The implementation of Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) in basic education is guided by Department of Education's (DepEd) three major outcomes—Access, Quality and Governance. Among the first important steps in the management of disaster is identifying the risk and vulnerabilities of communities. In any given circumstance, disasters will deprive children of their right to a continuous quality, basic education in a safe environment. Such disasters, and at this time, a global pandemic threatens the lives of the children, their families and education personnel.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) adopted in 2006 was the first significant human rights instrument aimed at protecting and promoting the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). The convention builds and elaborates on rights already set out in the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons of 1982, and the 1993 Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, among other United Nations (UN) human rights instruments (OHCHR, 2010). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2007), about 10 % or 200 million of the world's children have a form of disability. These children often require additional educational and physical support and spend much of their school day under the direct supervision of a special educator (UNICEF, 2007).

Research in disaster risk reduction play a vital role to aid practitioners who often needs to do needs assessments, monitoring and evaluation as part of their projects, addressing the needs that has the biggest impact and lastly to answer the question, to what extent did we do what we said we were going to do. In answering these questions, we will be able to aid agencies to improve the way they implement disaster risk reduction programs. Studies on disasters have expanded enormously globally, which calls for frequent synthesis of the research trends and topics, issues, challenges, and strategies and innovations in dealing with disasters.

Amidst global pandemic, schools manage to hold classes through blended distance learning. The Department of Education (2020) in its DepEd Order 12, series of 2020 or the Adoption of Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) for School Year 2020-2021 mandated the continuity of learning through a package of education interventions that will respond to the basic education challenges brought about by Covid-19.

Since the announcement of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte in March 2020, placing the entire National Capital Region on Enhanced Community Quarantine All school improvement plans, and its projects pushed through as we shift its objectives, implementation and learners' participation remotely as guided by the BE-LCP. General Maximino Hizon Elementary School has been very active in the disaster preparedness pursuits even when the school was still on face-to-face classes. Now that schools were put on halt which started first week of March 2020, the researchers shifted the focus of disseminating information about disaster risk reduction, shared with families and communities at the comfort of their homes.

This paper aims the following research objectives:

1. to systematically address issues on Disaster Risk Reduction involving learners with disabilities on disaster preparedness, involving their families and communities. When schools were closed and learning continues at home, it is paramount to continue disaster preparedness and educating them incessantly at home.
2. to achieve the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, our school designed an Index on Disaster Preparedness that geared toward empowering the Four (4) Pillars of Disaster Risk Reduction with better understanding among our most vulnerable learners and their families.
3. to aid agencies to improve the way they implement disaster risk reduction programs.

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the current issues that involves learners with disabilities that we should focus on in the discussion of disaster risk reduction in the time of Covid-19 pandemic?
2. What is the role of information dissemination on disaster risk reduction among learners with disabilities and their families?
3. What assistance can General Maximino Hizon Elementary School provide to learners with disabilities and their families in providing information dissemination on disaster risk reduction in the time of Covid-19 pandemic?

## **2. Disaster Risk Reduction at GMHES**

General Maximino Hizon Elementary School (GMHES) is a public school in Tondo, Manila that caters for both regular learners and those with special educational needs. Marginalization can be experienced by any student regardless of labels attached to them (Messiou, 2012). The Schools Disaster Risk Reduction Committee ensures that learners with disabilities were the highest concern in disaster preparedness being an inclusive school. Listening to the children's and young people's voices in itself is a manifestation of being inclusive (Messiou, 2006). Both teachers and learners participate in the evaluation after each earthquake and fire drills are conducted. Children with disabilities are often excluded from disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives and, as a result, can experience amplified physical, psychological, and educational vulnerabilities. Research on children with disabilities during disasters is lacking, and their potential value in helping shape inclusive policies in DRR planning has been largely overlooked by both researchers and policymakers.

Children are often excluded from disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities, yet they are one of the most vulnerable groups to disasters. As a result, they experience physical, psychological and educational vulnerabilities. There is lack of research on children's participation in DRR and their potential value in strengthening community resilience has been largely overlooked (Muzuenda-Mudayanhu, 2016). While disasters cannot be avoided, the risks faced by children and those with disabilities can be prevented or lessened. Very little research in the Philippines has addressed children with disabilities' vulnerabilities and capacities during times of disaster. Children with disabilities are the least looked upon and listened-to members of society. Hence the need to explore the vulnerabilities of these children with disabilities when disasters strike and hear from them and their families themselves how they can be helped that their needs are met and prepared.

Though there is a long history behind children's rights in international agreements, there is a gap between the rhetoric of the agreements and reality of authorities' provisions for children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of natural disasters (Mitchell & Borchard 2014). In developing countries, the largest population consists of children who are facing 'daily risks related to persistent poverty, street crime and violence, poor health, no or low-quality housing, and inadequate and ineffective schools and are continually affected by natural disasters.

Reports globally on what has been done and that can be utilized to enhance the participation of children in disasters is that children with illiterate parents can convey messages about DRR. They can also recognize disasters alongside social and economic threats (Mitchell et al. 2008). Though they can convey disaster messages and recognize disasters, they are usually not given the chance to do so. Given the resources, encouragement, and the opportunity to participate, there is also a need to determine the manner in which children can build community resilience in their areas. Needless to say, neither the children with disabilities nor their families were not given the chance to reiterate how vulnerable their situation is should a disaster hit their community.

### **3. Research Method**

This paper aims to systematically address issues on Disaster Risk Reduction involving learners with disabilities on disaster preparedness. The focus on how and by whom the research has been conducted to formulate future strategies for strengthening research capacity amid school closures and the implementation of the BE-LCP in structuring this project on disaster preparedness of learners with special educational needs of GMHES.

This descriptive research involves data collection focuses on the particular aspect of behavior as objective as possible and observes the richness and complexity of the behavior of the participants in the study. The researchers obtained data through survey questions, analyzed the participants with a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in disaster preparedness among the learners with disabilities and their families.

The Schools Disaster Risk Reduction committee conducted a webinar on disaster management to families of learners with disabilities, teachers and administrators. The resource speaker was the Schools Division Disaster Risk Reduction Coordinator. The webinar was well attended with 87 parents and guardians across all classes from special education. The webinar lasted for 2 hours, and information were systematically disseminated to parents and learners with disabilities (hearing, visual, intellectual disability and autism spectrum). The survey form was sent through google form after the webinar conducted to the parents.

The researchers conducted a survey (IDI). The gathered data from the interview with the targeted participants was then transcribed and translated by the researchers. Among the answers given by the said respondents, the researchers have evaluated their prior knowledge about the said topic. The transcription was then analyzed and showed results.

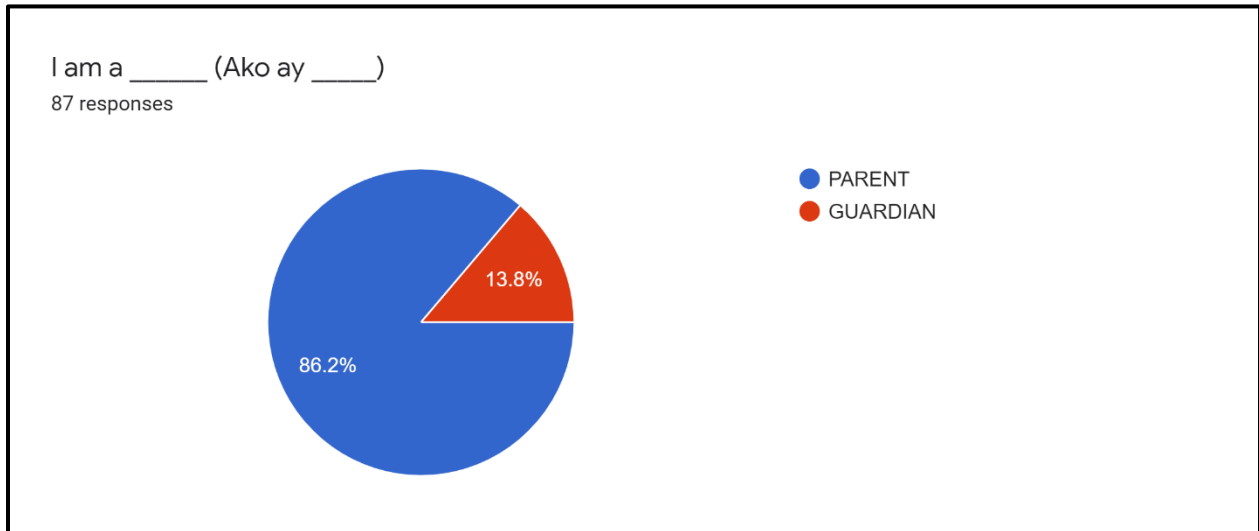
### **4. Results and Discussion**

Since the 1970s, the Philippines has updated the legal foundations for disaster risk reduction and management, focusing on response-centric interventions as well as disaster prevention, preparedness, and mitigation activities. Since 2003, local risk governance legislation has been supplemented to allow the use of local calamity funds for disaster preparedness and mitigation. However, these were considered insufficient to support change at the local level. This acknowledgement led to the enactment of the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010 (or Republic Act 10121), as the country's foremost legal instrument and guiding policy framework driving DRRM momentum across various governance levels.

With the participation of stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, a national disaster response plan was developed and adopted for various hazards and disaster scenarios. The NDRRMC Operation Center was created to monitor, evaluate, and coordinate disaster response operations. Pre-Disaster Risk Assessment – Actions Programs and Protocols (PDRA-APP) and capacity building for emergency preparedness, Incident Command System (ICS), Search and Rescue, and PDNA are all activities of the OCD. OCD, in collaboration with other government counterparts such as DILG and the Philippine Public Safety College (PPSC), has continued to provide DRM support to LGUs. Some LGUs have also already established their own local operations center.

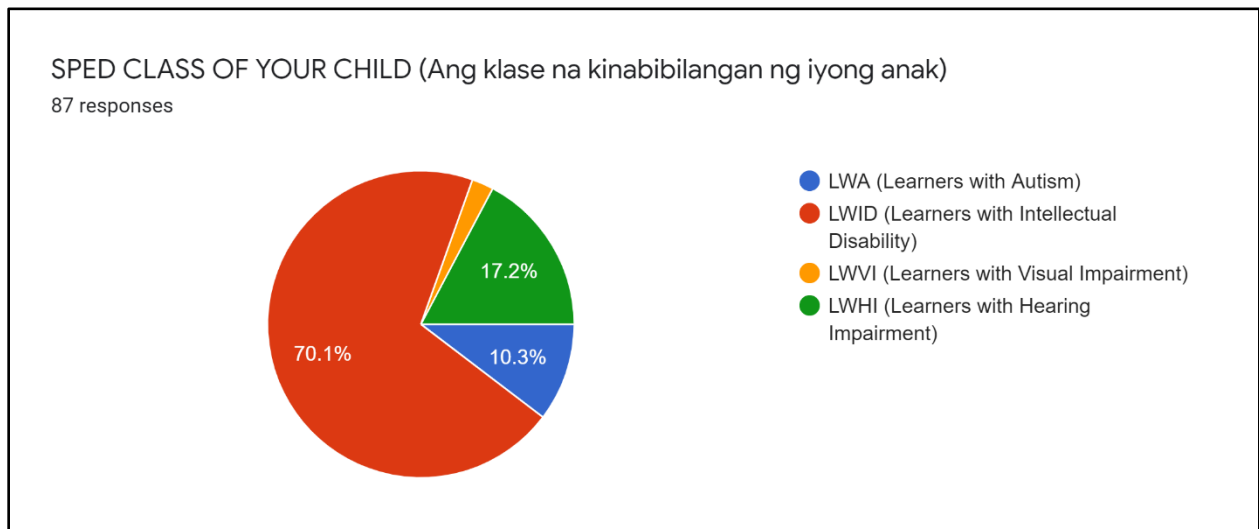
The following figures show the responses of the parents in the survey conducted after the webinar on Disaster Risk Reduction was organized.

Figure 1



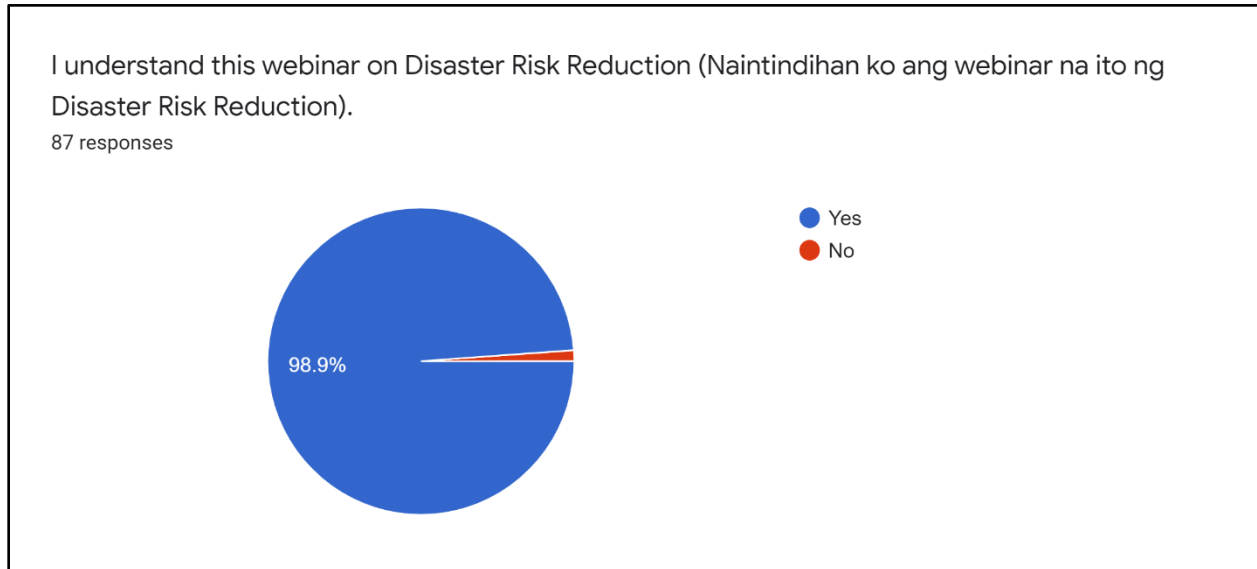
The figure above shows that among 87 attendees of the webinar on Disaster Preparedness for Learners with Special Educational Needs, 75 participants are parents (86.2%), while 12 participants are guardians (13.8%).

Figure 2



The figure above shows the attendees of the webinar, the distribution of the classes which their learners are enrolled.

Figure 3



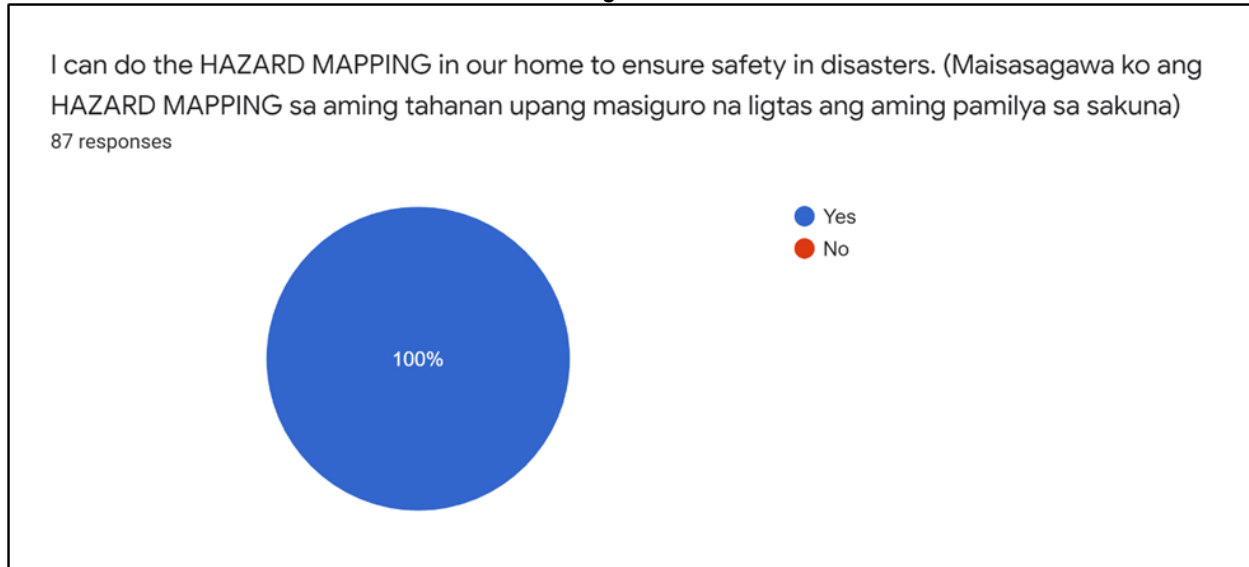
The figure above shows that among 87 attendees of the webinar on Disaster Preparedness for Learners with Special Educational Needs, 86 participants (98.9%), expressed their understanding of the webinar while 1 participant (1.1%) think otherwise.

Figure 4



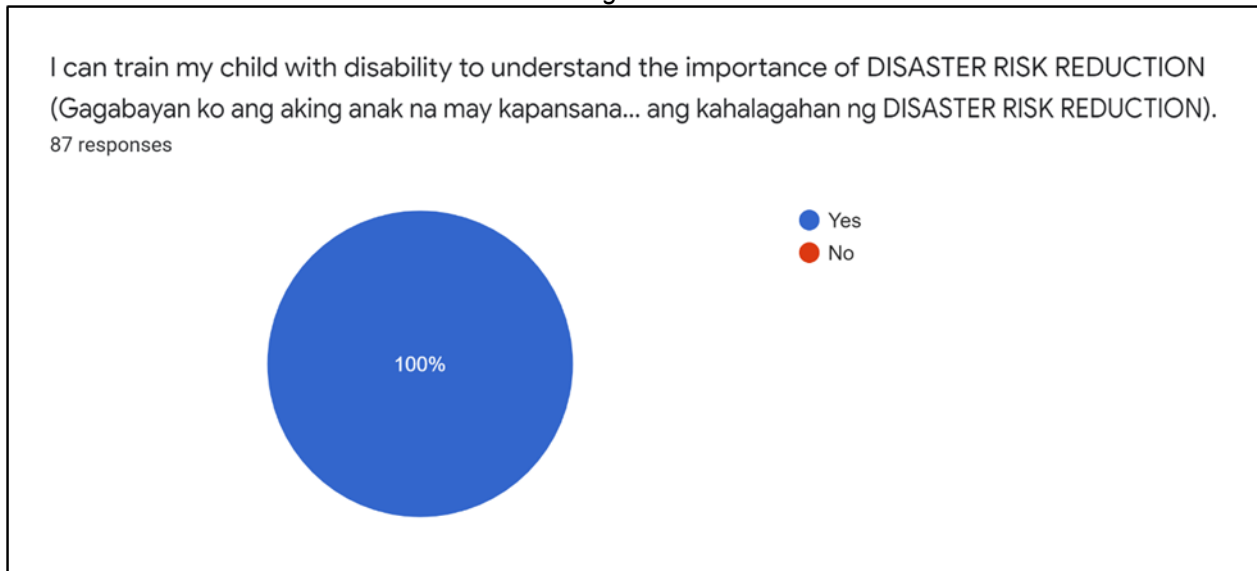
The figure above shows that among 87 attendees, 86 participants (98.9%), expressed that the webinar will help them toward meaningful disaster risk reduction while 1 participant (1.1%) think otherwise.

Figure 5



The figure above shows that among 87 attendees, all participants believe that they can do the Hazard Mapping at home to ensure safety in disasters.

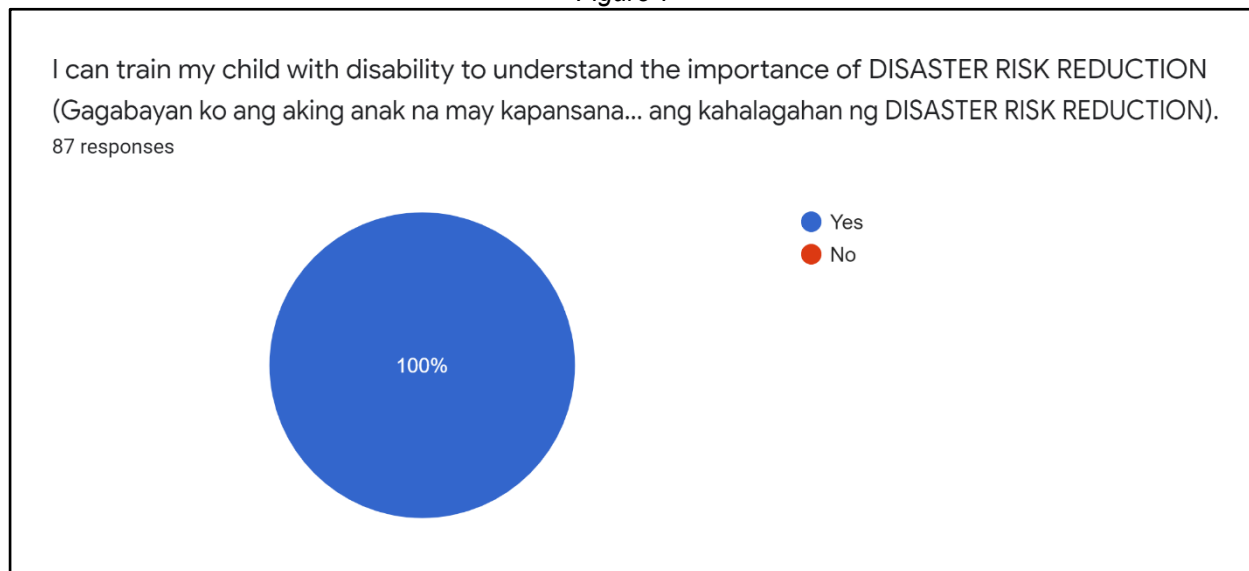
Figure 6



The figure above shows that all 87 attendees (100%), believe that they can do the Hazard Mapping at home to ensure safety in disasters.



Figure 7



The figure above shows that all 87 attendees (100%), believe that they can train their child at home to ensure safety in disasters.

## 5. Conclusion

The limited research focused on children with disabilities during disasters highlights a pressing need for further study to assess and understand effective pathways for ensuring active participation of children with disabilities, both at school and in the community (Mihaylov et al. 2004).

This study has carefully looked in the experiences of the learners and their families. While it is fairly concluded that, as there is no field research specific to the experiences of children with disabilities in response to disaster has been undertaken, we at General Maximino Hizon Elementary School are yet to establish how we can well equip disaster preparedness among learners with disabilities and their families, in our school, within the schools and across the country. Children with disabilities have been overlooked in DRR initiatives and may also have difficulties obtaining access to resources in the face of disasters, thus making them potentially vulnerable when facing natural and other hazards.

There may also be a lack of commitment by decision-makers to accept the views on how learners with disabilities and their families a failure in has been representing them in disaster preparations. In most developing countries, communities do not believe in children's rights but rather that children should follow what the elders say and, in our case, how the community will perceive their situation and vulnerability and helping them in the most compassionate way the community can should there be an unfortunate event or disaster.

Disaster risk is also a complex issue involving the physical environment, and the social, cultural, political and economic spheres of the society. This complexity is the major obstacle to effective children's participation in DRR. A holistic approach can be applied for effective DRR, but that option has failed to influence policy makers in most developing countries.

In conclusion, the Disaster Risk Reduction Management in General Maximino Hizon need to establish, strengthen and plan more programs and advocacies involving learners with special needs and their families. Furthermore, now that we are in the time of pandemic, our responses should be tailor made for mitigation and disaster risk reduction at home and in communities.

## **6. Recommendations**

The School Disaster Risk Reduction Committee is committed in establishing a strong impact on disaster preparedness by not stopping in information dissemination to ensure a positive response among its teaching force, staff, learners, their families, their communities, and all stakeholders.

As a recommendation, the infographics will take a big leap as we kick-off the cycle of this research: access of families of SPED learners to a printed infographics that will be posted in their house. The more these infographics will be present, the better retention of the disaster risk reduction through meaningful and colorful story map representation of the infographics.

Another, discussion of the results to other SPED schools in Manila, and eventually to more Divisions and Regions so they can put up their own webinar such as this and adopt the infographics for their learners with disabilities.

Lastly, to have this study presented in different research fora, to promote the impact of disaster risk reduction and promoting inclusion of the learners with disabilities and families and discuss how such studies can influence policy makers, administrations and each of us that their voices will be heard in disaster reduction in our society.

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