

## Appraisal of Early Childcare Centres in Ampara on Select Criteria

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### Abstract

Provision of early childcare is highly needed for the growth robust society. That is why, many institutions are interested in fostering early childcare centres for the benefits of children and the parents. However, there is an absence of comprehensive studies to assess these centres and the facilities available. This study is aimed at appraising the early childcare centres in Ampara district on certain criteria. The findings of the study revealed that the status of the centres is relatively poor in terms of facilities, safety and child protection, etc. It was concluded that the early childcare centres in Ampara district should be monitored regularly and the facilities available be upgraded to provide better service to the children admitted in these centres.

**Keywords:** Early Childcare; Appraisal; Ampara District.

### Introduction

Provision of quality, safe, and better childcare services is important for the development of children. Early childcare facilities in the childcare centres should be standardized and modernized. To achieve this status, a comprehensive viable system should be established to maintain quality and ensure proper monitoring of childcare centres in all the districts of Sri Lanka.

“The first child care institution was established in Sri Lanka as far back as in 1851 and most of had their operation commenced in the fourth quarter of the last century. According to Department of Probation and Childcare Services (2013), “in Sri Lanka, at present 14,179 children are living in 414 institutions situated in a wide geographical area covering all nine provinces of the country” (Ibid: 14). At present, it is alleged that situation of most of the early childcare centres in the country is very bad and lacking basic facilities (UNESCO, 2004). The system for maintaining

quality assurance there is obsolete. The issues and challenges of the early childcare centres are neither identified nor suitable solutions found.

In this backdrop, National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) has, as a step to empower the early child care centres in the country, taken a constructive initiative to identify the systematic issues that persist in the childcare centres and to develop a national guidelines for them in providing quality child care in the country through research. As there is no previous studies made to appraise the early child care centres, this study is done to fill this gap.

### *Significance of the Study*

1. Although there are a number of studies done regarding child care provided in childcare centres, a survey of related literature has revealed that there is no study found focusing the current status of early childcare provision for children in Sri Lanka.
2. This study is expected to ascertain the present status of the childcare provision and its persistent challenges and issues.
3. This study is also expected to provide solutions and suggestions to the policy planners and the authorities concerned in the country to strengthen the present system of childcare provision.

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### Scope of the Study

- The study was restricted to only Ampara district.
- Only registered early childcare centers were appraised in the study.
- The children below 05 years of age were considered for the study.
- Selected Criteria includes Child Safety and Protection, Facilities and Conditions in the Early Childcare Centres Health and Psychological Condition of Children.

### Objectives of the Study

#### *Major Objectives*

- To review the status of child care centers in Ampara with reference to selected criteria.
- To make suggestions for strengthening the system.

### Method of the Study

This study adopted a survey method. Both quantitative and qualitative data were utilised and analyzed using triangulation and other analytical techniques. These data were primary as well as secondary. The secondary data were obtained from the Department of Probation and Childcare Services, Provincial Probation Offices and other related agencies.

#### *Population and Sample of the Study*

The population of the study constitutes all the child care centres in Ampara district and all 14 early childcare centres were selected for the study. An Scale which was developed by the investigator was validated using experts' validation and pilot run conducted in two early childcare centres located in Kandy. Based on the information received in the pilot run, the scale was further moderated in consultation with experts in early childcare hood development. The criteria for appraising the centres on the Scale were decided after surveying relevant literature and discussion with the experts.

For focus group interview, 10 probation officers, 20 officers from early childcare centres in the district and 05 mothers whose children were accommodated in these centres participated at the discussion and various issues related to childcare were gathered. The investigator visited all 14 centres with support of research assistant and gathered information using

the Scale he developed. Secondary data too were used to gather information about the early childcare centres.

### Results and Discussion

Both qualitative and quantitative data gathered in the study were analyzed by using descriptive method. Major findings are drawn and discussed with previous studies to strengthen the study. They are as follows:

#### *Status of Early Childcare Centers in Ampara*

Children's life at institutions needs close attention as most of them are under age of 05 and they need love and care (OECD, 2006). The children's life experiences at their respective institutions seemed to have had severe impact on their lives. These institutions are considered as temporary homes that help children at difficult times of their lives. They are meant to prepare children to face the challenges of their lives and eventually become good and productive citizens.

#### *Facilities and Conditions in the Early Childcare Centres*

According the information gathered all the 12 Early Childcare Centres operated either by NGO, or Government, or Religious Organisations, are registered under ministry of Social Welfare. In all the centres, the basic facilities such as toilets, sleeping and playing space, electricity, etc. are available. In three centres, the facilities available to the children at these institutions such as recreation and sports facilities ranked high. Some of the institutions provided their children with televisions and computers (sometimes with internet facilities). Facilities for indoor and outdoor games also made children happy. Some children were appreciative of the medical facilities provided to them. In general, the life at the institution has been organized in an orderly manner. At the same time, there were unhappy children, too. A main reason for their unhappiness has been the unsatisfactory relationships they had with their matrons and other children.

From the children's perspective the conditions at the institutions depended on many criteria. The freedom within the institution, safety, food, availability or non-availability of a homely environment, rules and regulations, attitudes of the management, counseling services and the cooperation of other children are some of them.

### *Safety and Child Protection*

In all the centres, there are less attention given for the safety of children and their protections. There are tables, furniture, electricity connections, etc are not well protected. There is no fire extinguisher in any of the centres. The floor are sleepy in three centres. There are no first aid boxes for the children. Even caregivers are not trained on child protections and safety. However, Manager of a centre told "the management decided to provide safety measures in the centre at a cost of 250,000.00". This is a welcome move in respect of safety of children.

### *Health and Psychological Condition of Children*

A large majority of children are mentally disturbed. According to date nearly 70 per cent of the children are mentally imbalanced at different degrees. Among them, 50% of them are suffering any one of common diseases. Many children are not happy about without their mothers. The strict administration of rules and regulations has also pressurized the children. Sometimes children are not allowed to play, eat and see picture at odd times. Many of the children are reported to be discriminated. This state of frustration has been aggravated by the unfriendly behaviour of some care givers.

### *Opportunities for Education of Children*

Only 3 children are going to preschools. These schools are run by religious groups. Two children, though aged 04 are not going to school for the reason that there is no preschool close to the centre.

A child wanted to study like other children though there were no classes conducted for the children aged 3-5 (Jazeel, 2017). This is a violation of their right to education. This child is an orphan and sent to the centre by her relatives/

### *Suggestions for Strengthening System*

For strengthening the system of providing quality early childcare facilities, the following suggestions are made.

1. The children staying in the centre should be given homely environment. Then only they will be happy and free. This will improve their health as well.
2. Proper training should be provided to workers and officers involved in care-giving to offer a humane and effective service. Trained officers and workers can show love and affection to the children.

3. Good practices of other institutions should be shared among centres so that the centres can produce such good work in their centres.
4. Sufficient number of caregivers should be appointed to maintain close supervision of the inmates. This will strengthen the service provided even further.
5. Strict administration rules and regulations followed in certain centres should be revised and reviewed. A friendly management is important for the live of children.
6. Welfare of children in need of protection must be ensured and minimum quality standards prescribed by the Provincial Commissioners of Probation and Child Care should be evaluated.
7. The existing facilities and developing alternative care services - such as foster families and continuous monitoring of children with special needs - should be developed.

### **Conclusions**

It is concluded that most of the early childcare centres in Ampara district do not have enough facilities for living of small children. The basic facilities need to be improved. Only few centres are suitable for early childcare. The parents of the children living in the centre are not aware of how their children being treated at the centres. As they are working and they have other relatives to look after the children, they keep their children in the centres. In some cases, even court has sent children to stay in the centres. The foods provided to children are less nutritious. Many of children life at the centres are not happy. Most of them are psychologically imbalanced and they had limited educational opportunities.

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