

## **A STUDY ON CURRENT STATUS AND READING HABITS OF CHILDREN AT THE CHILD PROTECTION CENTERS IN CENTRAL PROVINCE IN SRI LANKA**

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**Abstract:** *The study sought to assess the reading habits among children and their library facilities available for them at their child protection center. The study was conducted in Central Province in Sri Lanka. A questionnaire survey was used for the data collection and the data were analysed with the descriptive analysing methods. There are 35 child homes which are run by voluntary organizations under the supervision of the Department of Probation and Child Care Services in Central province, Sri Lanka. Whole population was treated as sample. Objectives of this study was to identify the existing library facilities at the child home, to propose the children how to use library and inculcate reading habit and to assist the managers of the child home to develop the library collection with supporting of government and other agencies. According to the results, 80 percent of the libraries have no permanently allocated area as a library. There were 20 to 2000 books available for the readers. 77 percent of the centers have no internet facilities where as rest have internet facilities but very limited access to utilize the services. 41 percent of the child protection centers always allows readers to utilize the library facilities. The main purpose of using the library facilities were to find information for their assignments, lending and to read subject materials. There are no trained person to manage the resources in the libraries therefore this study recommends to enhance the library resources with a good management to enrich the reading habits among the children's at child protection centers.*

**Keywords:** *Child Protection Centre, Reading habits, Reading interest, Library facilities*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The reading habits of children have long been a matter of much interest to educators, parents, librarians and other stakeholders. An understanding reading habits and preferences of children would help than to take necessary measures for promoting reading among children (Majid 2007). Rapid economic development and social changes are exposing children to greater risks, such as displacement, the growing urbanization and migration, and the breakdown of traditional family structures as parents and/or young people leave home to seek better opportunities in cities and parents go abroad to find jobs. In this context child protection issues are becoming increasingly prominent as children are more vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation, including child labor, sexual exploitation and street children. Therefore the child protections is a critical issue in the Sri Lankan society and the number of child homes are also have increased. The centers have to give more attention to protect, educate and assist to create a good citizen to the country. The Department of Probation and Child Care in Central Province supports to provide protection and care for orphaned, deserted, helpless and abused children. This study is mainly focuses on evaluating the current

library facilities available for the children at child protection centers and identify the reading habits among children in this Centers.

## **METHODS**

Literature survey shows there are very few studies has been done at the child protection centers with regards to identify the reading habits or existing library facilities of the child protection centers. Therefore, it is very important to give attention to explore the existing situation of the library facilities, reading habits of the children in these centers and identify the issues to be addressed in future. Pre-tested Questionnaire with close and open ended questions was given to all 35 child protection centers located within the Central Province. Whole population was treated as sample. Questionnaires were distributed to all the representatives of the centers and among them 30 centers were responded and the response rate was 85 percent. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods.

## **RESULTS:**

Results revealed that the library services for child protection centers have given less priority. The majority of the respondents acknowledge the importance of reading habits but they have very limited library facilities at their child centers. Reading is one of the most fundamental skill and it is an important language skill that a child needs to survive in the learning environment. There were altogether 941 children's at the selected child homes. Among them, 66 percent were females and 34 percent were males. Based on the results obtained, 80 percent of the libraries have no separate building or permanently allocated area as a library and others maintain their libraries using a book shelves, cupboards or in a small room. There were 20 to 2000 books available for the readers in the Centers. This result indicates the attention given by the child protection centers to encourage the reading abilities among the children in there. Children in these kind of centers needed to be open to the world via the global networks through internet facilities. However, 77 percent of the centers have no internet facilities where as rest has internet facilities but very limited access to utilize the services. Places like child protection centers, have children there at every time. In 41 percent of the child protection centers always allow readers to utilize the library facilities but in other centers opening hours of library facilities varies such as on the weekends and only in the after schools. The purpose of using the library facilities were to find information for their assignments, lending and to read subject materials. The child protection centers have a number of officers such as matron or sister, preschool teachers and laborer. Children's in the child homes obtain assistance from them to find materials for their needs. Focusing on the administration of the libraries, there are no trained person or officer to manage the resources in the libraries in this kind of centers but in

most places, matron is the responsible person to the library resources and all the related activities.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study clearly expresses the real situation in the current context and the condition of facilities available for the stakeholders. The coordinators of the centers have proposed the following suggestions to improve the library facilities of the child protection centers. To establish a separated library and assist to develop the library collection, provide the extra reading material to preparation of the national exams, providing the training for coordinators to manage the library facilities, provide proper guidance with regards to reading habits, since children are very attracted to the audio visual materials it is essential to develop the collection on audio visual materials within the centers. There should have motivational programs, reading promotion programs with an activity base to improve reading habits. Improving of the library facilities such as standard furniture for kids, match the color to the library building, improve the subject related books and appoint a permanent library staff member to manage the library resources. These suggestions are very important for the higher authorities in their future planning to assist the libraries in child protection centers in Sri Lanka. Therefore this study recommends to improve the library facilities in following manner. For the purpose of enabling the better environment for the readers, there should have a separated library room or a proper place most importantly with the suitable collection of books. It should not make available all the books which were donated by the donators but to make available the most suitable collection of materials for the children. The staff of the child homes needed to be trained with the management skills of the library. The library should take responsibility to promote the children for reading, such as creating a leisure reading corner and introduce story times to improve the reading habits. It is very much essential to obtain assistance to improve the library facilities with support from the Government and Non-government agencies and to expand the library materials such as collection of books, CD, DVD collections. Involving children in the selection of library materials and development of library services will be a better approach to enhance the reading habits in among the children in the child protection centers. Developing good reading habits is vital in a child's future not just academically, but in everyday life as well and the lifelong love of books.

## **CONCLUSION**

Currently, children in child protection centers in Central province have very limited library facilities and therefore this should further improve to improve

the reading habits of them. Generally all of them maintains their libraries using a book shelves, cupboards or in a small room. This study strongly recommends to improve the library resources in child protection centers to improve the reading habits of the children in there.

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