

ABUSE OF CHILDREN, PRIOR TO ADMISSION TO SOME CHILDREN'S HOMES IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA, 2005

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Child abuse is perceived by many as a major social problem while some believe that currently we are beginning to face the true prevalence and significance of child abuse in the Central Province. However during the course of our work, it was noticed that there is no valid documented statistics on child abuse available in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. This survey was conducted to find out the number of children who were victims of abuse in children's homes in the Central Province, to determine the types of abuse, to assess victimization rates according to gender and to identify short-term effects of abuse on these children.

A list of 30 children's homes in the Central province of Sri Lanka, registered with the Department of Probations and Child care was obtained. A questionnaire regarding the details of inmates of the selected homes was administered to the matrons in charge of these homes, with the approval of the Department of Probations and Childcare. The questionnaire was in Sinhala and was explained to the matrons with necessary clarifications. The matrons were requested to complete the questionnaire within 2 weeks of distribution.

The completed questionnaires were collected and data analysis was done, using Microsoft excel and SPSS programs. Questionnaires were recovered from 14 children's homes out of the 30 homes to which the questionnaires were sent. Data of 555 children was available. Accordingly 71 (12.79 %) of children were victims of child abuse while out of this 25 (35.21 %) were sexually abused, 24 (33.80 %) were neglected, 19 (26.76 %) were physically abused, and 3 (4.23 %) were psychologically abused.

According to this study there was a marked difference in female and male victimization. It was observed that out of all abused children that a majority (81.69 %) were females, while all sexual abuse cases were females. The short-term effects of child abuse mentioned included nightmares, depression, fear, aggressiveness and anxiety while nightmares topped the list by occurring in 20 (28.17 %) of abused children. Only 10 (14.08 %) of the abused children were seen by a psychologist after abuse.