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Enhancing child protection for children with disabilities in Sri Lanka: Aligning with the UNCRPD

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Background: Amid global shifts from institutional to family-centric models in child protection systems, children with disabilities (CWD) remain marginalized from social systems. Despite the existence of legislative and policy initiatives, fragmented implementation and social stigma continue to leave CWD behind. This study investigated the policy and practical disparities hindering CWD inclusion in Sri Lanka and explored rights-based strategies aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Method: This study consists of two linked articles: a scoping review and an expert interview analysis, contributing to policy recommendations. The review examined 242 academic and policy documents to assess Sri Lanka's alignment with the UNCRPD and included a comparison with international practices. The second article involved semistructured interviews with 11 experts from NGOs, government entities, and institutions. Thematic analysis of the interviews identified key challenges and practical suggestions across policy and implementation.

Results: The scoping review revealed major gaps in accessibility, inter-agency coordination, public awareness, legal infrastructure, and data availability. Expert interviews confirmed these gaps and highlighted cultural stigma, incoherent services, and the absence of a cohesive regulatory system. Compared to global standards, Sri Lanka continues to face challenges in establishing a unified, disability-inclusive child protection model with measurable outcomes.

Conclusions: To strengthen CWD protection in Sri Lanka, actionable strategies aligned with the UNCRPD are vital. Recommendations include reinforcing legal frameworks, enhancing stakeholder coordination, launching national awareness campaigns, and promoting legal literacy. This study emphasizes the urgent need for a comprehensive regulatory structure to protect CWD rights and address societal attitudes toward disability, ensuring effective policy implementation.

Keywords: Disability, child protection, UNCRPD.