

ICCP/SL/OP/370

Role of school principals in minimizing child abuse in Sri Lanka: A study in the Kelaniya Educational Zone, Sri Lanka

Chathuranga RSDL^{*1}

*Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya,
Sri Lanka*

** c_rajapaksha@icloud.com*

Background: In 2024, the Police Children and Women Bureau reported 1,408 cases of sexual assault against children in Sri Lanka, with 214 resulting in pregnancy. Many abuses occur due to apparent “consent” by victims and lack of awareness. Since children attend school from age 5 - 18, schools are positioned to deliver not only academic knowledge but also life skills. The objective of this study was to examine awareness & interventions by school principals aimed at minimizing child abuse.

Method: A quantitative study was conducted using a structured questionnaire distributed to 60 randomly selected school principals from 114 schools in the Kelaniya educational zone. The questionnaire focused on principals’ awareness of child abuse, preventive measures taken, and collaboration with relevant child protection institutions. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results: The study found that 93% (n=56) of principals lacked knowledge about child abuse statistics locally and nationally. Fifty-seven percent (n=34) were unaware of the emergency contact number for the Police Children and Women Bureau, and while 90% (n=54) had not displayed the contact number in their schools. Furthermore, 15% (n=9) had not conducted any child protection programs, while 66% (n=40) of existing initiatives used traditional lecture-based methods. Only 65% (n=39) of principals had established partnerships with child protection agencies.

Conclusions: Principal awareness and intervention regarding child abuse were found to be inadequate. To strengthen prevention efforts, principals should be provided with current statistical data on child abuse and receive timely training on response protocols. Regular awareness programs should be implemented for students, staff, and parents. Emergency contact numbers must be visibly displayed in all schools, and collaboration with regional child protection institutions should be reinforced.

Keywords: Child abuse, principals, awareness.