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### **Exploring parental attitudes towards vocational training to secure the future of children with special needs: A human security perspective**

Gunasekara DSCDP\*, Pathirana PDBS, Silva SGJ

*General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka*

*[\\*arexams@kdu.ac.lk](mailto:arexams@kdu.ac.lk)*

**Background:** In Sri Lanka, children with special needs have issues that run deep roots, like social, economic and institutional challenges that prevent them from becoming included and independent. Among them, the absence of paternal care increases the likelihood that the impacted individuals would experience future problems. This study examines the perception of parents towards vocational training as a means of securing their special needs in future lives of their children in the context of human security.

**Method:** The study followed a qualitative research methodological approach. The study was conducted between late 2024 to May 2025. Primary data was collected from parents registered under the Ratmalana Divisional Secretariat. A total of 25 purposively selected parents were interviewed in a semi-structured way as the method of collecting data and analyzed using thematic analysis. In line with this, three major themes were identified. Specifically, economic empowerment (freedom from want), psychosocial protection (freedom from fear) and dignity through inclusion (freedom from indignity).

**Results:** The findings of the study indicated that parents believe that vocational training is important with regard to financial independence and reducing dependence. On the other hand, parents fear about safety, discrimination of their children and the uncertain future of them in the event of absence of parents. In addition, a lot of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of inclusive training that meets job market demands and the ignorance of institutions. Despite these concerns, a strong parental support was there for inclusive career methods that aim for community acceptability and that respect the capabilities of the children with special needs.

**Conclusion:** In order to address the many uncertainties that children with special needs confront, this study emphasizes how vital it is to incorporate human security principles into vocational training programs. Better institutional coordination, rights-based policy frameworks that promote parental trust and child engagement, and participatory program designs are some of the policy proposals. The study was limited to the perceptions of parents in the Ratmalana Division. However, this study contributes to the understanding of fundamentals to create inclusive development plans in Sri Lanka to ensure every child, irrespective of ability, gets an opportunity to live with dignity, security, and purpose.

**Keywords:** Vocational training, special needs education, parental attitudes, human security.