

## **OP 13: Challenges and opportunities for inclusive education: Perceptions of parents of children with disabilities receiving speech and language therapy services in Colombo District**

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**Background:** There is evidence that suggest disability is an issue that prevents children from accessing mainstream education in Sri Lanka. Article 24 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which Sri Lanka has ratified, talks about Inclusive Education. However, United Nations Universal Periodic Review - Sri Lanka (2017) reports that it has failed to implement it sufficiently in practice.

**Objective:** This study aimed to obtain a critical understanding of the challenges and opportunities for inclusive education of children with disabilities in Sri Lanka through the exploration of perceptions of parents of children with disabilities in the Colombo District.

**Methods:** This qualitative study used twenty semi-structured interviews of a purposive sample of parents of children with disabilities who receive speech and language therapy services in Colombo District. Data was analyzed using a thematic analysis process.

**Results:** Four major categories of challenges and four major categories of opportunities for inclusive education were identified: the identified challenges were negative attitudes and lack of awareness, parents' dissatisfaction of inclusive education, lack of resources and ignorance. The identified opportunities were accommodations by education authorities, assistive devices and correctional medical interventions and recognition of the inherent capacity of children with disabilities.

**Conclusion:** From the perspective of parents of children with disabilities, though there are some opportunities for inclusive education there are still multiple challenges that hinder the effective exercise of the right to inclusive education by children with disabilities under the Sri Lankan system.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, children with disabilities, parents, perception