

Full Length Research

Reading habits and information expectations of orphan children at Child Protection Centers in Central Province, Sri Lanka

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Accepted 19 March 2019

Accesses to the knowledge as well as lifelong learning and literacy skills have become the priority of the society. Orphan children and the child protection centers in Sri Lanka are gradually increasing. These children are also members of the society and it is essential to give more attention to educate them with the modern library facilities. It seems that the child protection centers have given less priority to improve the library resources. Therefore this type of survey will be very useful to policy makers to give more attention to improve the library facilities at the Child Centers. The main purpose of this study was to investigate reading habits and information expectation of orphan's children at the child protection centers in Central Province Sri Lanka. Open and closed ended questionnaire was used to this survey and also observation on child centers also was used. Data analyzing was the descriptive analyzing methods. There are 35 child protection centers in central province and all of them were selected to this survey. Under this survey 30 centers were responded. According to the results, it was revealed that the best time for use the library by children is weekends. There were 80% of the libraries have not separate building and also they have not permanently allocated area as a library. Other 20 % centers maintain their libraries using a book shelves, cupboards, in a small room. There are very limited funds raising and donor support for the development of libraries than the other supports at the child centres. The majority of children use the school library for their information needs as the outside of the child center. The survey found that the above centers have given less priority to the library and reading promotion. Therefore the policy makers and governing bodies of these centers should be given prior attention to develop these centers.

Key words: Reading habits, information expectations, orphan children, Child Protection Centers

Cite This Article As: Sunil Premarathne S., Bandara, E.S. (2019). Reading habits and information expectations of orphan children at Child Protection Centers in Central Province, Sri Lanka. *Inter. J. Acad. Lib. Info. Sci.* 7(3): 62-65

INTRODUCTION

Orphans children are defined as children between 0 and 18 years who have lost one or both parents and/or whose primary caregiver has died, or who are in need of care and protection. (Ministry of Women Affairs and Child

Welfare, 2004:1). The Department of Probation and Child Care Services provide the alternative care for the children who are without adequate parental care and protection due to various reasons and children in conflict with the

law. This includes providing institutional care as an alternative means of providing necessary protection. The report indicated that there are 14,179 children in 414 institutions located in all nine provinces in Sri Lanka. (D P C C S Survey report 2013). This is an unsatisfactory and controversial situation for the children in Sri Lanka. The child protection centers have to be given prior attention to care of them. Before admitted to the orphan centers, these vulnerable children had faced serious issues such as educational, no one to care, low income of the parents, parent living abroad, domestic violence, disability/illness sexual abuse, divorced parents, alcoholism, mother migration and insecurity at home. Moreover the mental stress caused to children by feuding parents, lack of love and care at home and unacceptable life styles of parents also caused to admit the children to the child centers. Therefore the government is responsible to give prior attention to care of these orphan children. Types of child protection centers which come under the Department of Probation and Child Care include receiving homes, detention homes, national training and counseling centers schools and voluntary children's homes as the child protection centers. "Access to the knowledge and the multicultural riches of the world, as well as lifelong learning and literacy skills have become the priority of our society. " Libraries acknowledge that children have special recreational reading needs". (Anita Brown -2004). A quality children's library equips children with lifelong learning and literacy skills, enabling them to participate and contribute to the community" (The Public Library Service – IFLA / UNESCO Guidelines for development, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the reading habits and information expectations of orphan children at the child protection centers in Central Province Sri Lanka. A questionnaire survey was used for the data collection and the data were analyzed with the descriptive analyzing methods. There are 35 child homes which are run by voluntary organizations under the supervision of the Department of Probation and Child Care Services in Central province, Sri Lanka.

The literature reviewed indicates that Sri Lanka has a high number of orphaned and increasing the children in the child protection centers. The most of the orphaned children are cared by volunteers or Non Government Organizations. The service providers or caregivers have given attention to look after them with providing of food, clothes, education etc. It was observed that they have given less priority to library. Therefore, this study was conducted to set out to address this knowledge gap, and to identify the information needs of children.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The main objective of this study was to identify the

Reading habits and information expectations of orphan children at Child Protection Centers in Central province, Sri Lanka.

1. Further to find out whether there are libraries in the child protection centers.
2. To determine the issues in library.
3. To identify the information requirement of the children.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

It is very important to conduct this type of survey with regards to find reading habits and information expectations of orphan children at child protection centers. It was observed that there are very limited library facilities in these centers. The questionnaire was distributed among representatives of child centers and the observation done at the centers randomly. Total number of 35 child protection centers in Central Province was selected and questionnaires were distributed to all the representatives of the centers. Total of 30 respondents were responded and the response rate was 85%. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was revealed that there were 80% of the libraries have no separate building and also they have not permanently allocated area as a library. Other 20% centers are maintaining their libraries using of book shelves, cupboards or in a small room. The collections of books were vary from each other and there were 20 to 2000 books available for their children in the Centers. It is positive feature and there are library facilities as primary level and they have dire need of a library.

It was given attention to observe their suggestions to develop the IT facilities at their centers and they all agreed to improve of the library facilities and also the IT facilities, technological accessories to these centers. All the representatives of the child protection centers responded with positive feedback and these facilities should be allocated for the children.

The survey revealed that the majority of the children are prefer to read children's magazines and followed by leisure reading magazines, sports magazines. It was revealed that their actual reading needs. They are keen on reading children's magazines as the first priority than others. This is a good finding to take decisions when people want to donate reading materials to such places.

The most convenient and preferred time for use the library is on weekends. Some of the children have mentioned that to open the library in the evening of the

weekdays. This reveals that they like to read more on their leisure time in the weekdays. The administrative staff should focus on promoting reading during the weekends than weekdays.

Children in child protection centers not only fulfill their information needs by utilizing the available reading materials at their centers but also they are utilizing the other libraries such as public libraries, temple libraries, children libraries, school libraries and other libraries. The most of the children are using their school libraries to fulfill their information needs as the shortages of resources available in the centers. Generally public libraries place less emphasis on supporting curriculum needs of the school children. Therefore the libraries of the child protection centres need to fulfil the information needs of the children with supporting of their school syllabuses and also essential to build up the partnerships between school, public libraries with the child centres to sharing of information. It is very important as there is no single library can provide every item needed in the children.

The study also focused to find out their future plans of the library. According to the coordinators perspectives, they will plan to allocate more reading spaces, quality reading materials, audio and video materials, place for the small children's for the children's activities and computer and internet facilities. At present, the children are more attracted to audio and video materials and other internet base resources available.

Child protection centers have not special fund or donor agency or any other institute to enhance the information resources for the children. It has identified specially the Department of Probation and Child Care Services and some Non-Government organizations were helped to these child protection centers time to time. Many of the institutes provide their support through the donations and most of the donations are collection of books. These books may not properly match with the age of the children's in the centers. Since these donations and all support provided are not continuous child protection centers. It was always far behind when comparing with other information providing institutes

The majority of child centers are not able to provide library facilities for the disabled children's at the child protection centers. In this study, it was revealed out of 30 child protection centers only one has the facilities of library services to the disabled children. In future it is better to focus on these facts since they are also part of our society and they should be well equipped with current information for the betterment of their future. They also have the intention to improve their facilities to enable for the disabled or in other words differently abled children's but they have no sponsorship or funds provided by the higher authorities. The managing staff / funding agencies and other responsible authorities must be given more attention on this matter and it will make some special

needy students life better. Administrators of the centers also have agreed to improve these facilities in their child protection centers.

Children's at child protection centres having counselling programmes mainly from Probation officers from the Department of probation and childcare and well trained external counselors. Department of probation and childcare is very much keen on this program and they have mentioned that the counseling programs are very successful. The counsellors also guiding children's to engage with more reading to enhance their knowledge and library facilities or reading opportunities should be further expanded than engaging with televisions at the child protection centers.

Even though they have limited information resources, children's may not visited to the library or the place allocated for the purpose of reading. The reasons for this issue are a collection of all the matters highlighted in the above. Some child protection centers having children below 10 years and since it is named as child protection centers some donators donating collections of books which may not suitable for their age. In the very small ages children's are more likely to have audio visual materials which are more attractive than books with small letters. So that based on this finding it is recommended to select proper information resources, by analyzing the target audience. Some centers having children's from all religions and they may speak in Sinhala, English or Tamil. Therefore, such information resources also should align with these requirements. The administrators of the centers have requested to provide more awareness programs about the reading habits, promoting reading among children's and staff training. Increasing of the information resources, establishment of well planned library management system, organizing of reading promotional programs etc.. at child protection centers are essential and they may be very useful to making them well informed citizens for the development of the country.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the survey the representatives of the child centers have given prior attention to needful of the library. They have suggested that there should have a good library with the current information resources. Also they should be upgraded according to the request of the children. Existing library facilities are very poor condition and some of the child centers only small box of books. They have not given attention to library. Some of the library has separated cupboard and a small reading area.

The matron or probation officers, preschool teachers who are responsible to these child centers to consult with students to learn of their interests and to ensure that the types of reading materials available in the centers or school, public library reflects those interests. They will

interest that a diverse range of reading materials will encourage students to read.

- The children should engage with the planning stage of the library requirement, purchasing of books, library activities, offering them the opportunity to select and purchase reading materials for their use.
- Promoting reading with the aim of inspiring all children to read for pleasure is a responsibility of all child centers. Also it is essential to create a culture in which all children are encouraged to be enthusiastic readers. The child centers also can be planned and implement the National Reading Campaign initiative.
- Organize the library visits with the children to motivate their reading habits and share their experiences and discuss problems.
- Provide opportunities to follow the library science courses to preschool teachers at the child centers.
- Provide good reading environment and increasing of educational facilities, Library resources should be increased and it is essential to establish a separate library in each child care centre.
- Assist to educational activities with using of the library. Allocate specific time for storytelling, library reading hours, reading month programs etc.
- Staff to engage in extracurricular activities with using the library.
- Proposing of the funds for library development fund to run the library or allocate an annual budget allocation to purchase books and journals, news papers and identify donors to build a separated library building.
- Identify the donor agencies to sustainability of the library facilities and create an efficient coordination with regional libraries for sharing on resources.

It is essential to propose and aware the higher authorities/management to the necessity of library for children at the child care centers. The Child Protection Authority, Department of probation and childcare services, Provincial councils and other related institutes should take necessary action to improve the library facilities for these child care centers.

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