

The Impact of Poverty for the Child Neglection

Himalshi P. Serasinghe,

(Department of Philosophy, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka)

ABSTRACT: Poverty could be well-known as unable to deliver basic needs for their children such as proper nutrition, access to health care, required education, adequate supervision, and emotional care. Children experience neglect from their families due to poverty. Child neglect is defined as the failure of providing essential food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision for the purpose of a child's health, safety, and wellbeing for the child from parents or guardians who have the responsibility. There is no reported research work to identify the association between poverty and child neglect in Sri Lankan Context. Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify the influence of poverty on child neglect. To achieve the purpose of the research, 10 interviews and 134 questionnaires were distributed to neglected children who were reported in Gampaha District and 10 interviews were carried out for the parents. In this work, descriptive statistics and content analysis methods were used for analysis purposes. Research outcomes show that physical neglect is the most common type of child neglect. While the cognitive neglect type has the lowest respondents. Supervision and emotional neglect rate as the second and third categories respectively. Based on the parent's intention, low income, marital status, low educational level, homeless and jobless status are directly affected to increase the poverty within the family.

Keywords -Child Neglection , Parental Factors,Poverty

I. INTRODUCTION

Child maltreatment is a main issue in the world which frequently reports all over from countries around the world (Han,2020). There are four major aspects of child abuse; (i) physical abuse (ii) sexual abuse (iii) emotional or psychological abuse and (iv) neglect (Child abuse and neglect by parents and other caregivers, n.d.). Though most of the scholars accept physical abuse and sexual abuse as the most common type of child abuse (Peltzer& Pengpid, 2016), contemporary data show that physical abuse is decreasing while child neglect is gradually increasing (Douglas,2014). Unfortunately, neglect is unreported and has been given fewer attention compared to other types of abuse. Further, child neglect is the main aspect of abuse and it has improved over the years that results in more harm to children in comparison to other types of abuses (Harrington,Zuravin, Depanfilis, Ting, & Dubowitz, 2002). This information shows that child neglect is gradually evolving into a child protection issue in Sri Lanka. Secondary data stressed various factors which influenced child neglect such as child age, the living area, educational level, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc (Ringwalt& Caye, 1989). Except for the children's factors, poverty plays the leading role in child to be neglected (Bartlett,Kotake, Fauth, & Easter brooks, 2017). Parents or guardians are affected by poverty because of unemployment, and lack of welfare facilities and benefits. Therefore, in this paper researcher has investigated the impact of poverty for the child neglection.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research was based on primary data, which were collected by using both qualitative and quantitative data. Secondary data method was used to interpret the results such as published researched articles, national and international documents. The population was children who were victims of child neglect in Gampaha District, Western Province, Sri Lanka. Further, the researcher used snowballing method for collecting data and the total sample size was 134 children who were below 19 years old.

The structured questionnaire was developed in English and was translated into Sinhala; hence every respondent in the sample population was able to understand the questions. The questionnaire consisted of two parts; the first part covered the demographic data of the respondents; the second part was on the type of neglect. The demographic part consisted of seven items such as gender, age, living area, siblings, religion, ethnicity, and level of education. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 29 items (Straus, Kinard & Williams, 1995) which were divided into four major parts as Physical neglect, emotional neglect, cognitive neglect, and supervision neglect. 134 questionnaires were distributed to neglected children who were reported in Gampaha District and conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with selected children aged between 12 and 18 and 10 semi-structured interviews for the parents. This study used descriptive statistics and content analysis as the tools of analysis. For the analysis purposes, the researcher used SPSS (v.21) and Excel (v. 2010).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education develops a country's economy and society (Idris, Hassan, Ya'acob, Gill, & Awal, 2012). Thus, few parents of the neglected children qualified till ordinary level (O/L) and most of them are only qualified grade 8 or 9. According to them, during their childhood, they couldn't get proper financial support or any guidance from anyone for their studies. Some relevant statements are as follows, *"After O/L I didn't study. I went to work. Parents were there to be looked after also noh. Both my brother and I went for jobs"* (p1), *"I studied up to grade 9. We did not have a proper financial support noh ma'am, and we were not interested in studies also"* (p4). Education is the best investment for the people. Besides, educated people have more opportunities to get a job which gives them satisfaction (Idris et al., 2012). As the sample of the study has not qualified with proper education, it might be affected badly to find a good job with a better salary. These parents are working a contract basis or daily basis. Most parents are working in the cleaning service at the supermarkets, private hospitals, working as laborers, and fishermen, etc. Therefore, they are suffering various disturbances for fulfilling their basic needs. *"Now, if we go to the kitchen, there are lots of shortages. What we do is, cook whatever we have left with. In case we don't have anything only we fight with people"* (p2), *"We don't fight, but we argue and shout a lot for money. When he is pressurized, he shouts at me and I also lose my control. So, I also shout back"* (p6).

The majority of parents in the sample represent young age when they are getting married. Most of them have married end of their teenage. *"When I was 19 years old got married"* (p1), *"When marrying my 1st husband, I was in my 20s. I was in my 30s when I got together with my 2nd husband."* (p3) *"I got married when I was 19 years"* (p6). Due to the teenage marriages, some participants have separated from the spouses and they have live with another person without getting legal bond. *"No, we are not legally married. He also live with another woman. So I came and settled down with this man. I came with my 4 children"* (p3), *"He didn't get legally separated from his previous wife neither are we married lawfully, but we are living together"* (p3).

For this reason, some of the participants (Children) have to live with their stepfathers or their relation's house. Therefore, they have to face various disturbances from adults. Based on the children's interviews, it is clear how parent's marriages affect children to be neglected. For instance, participant 04 (child) did not like to stay at home as her stepfather tried to abuse her. Her mother was not legally separated from her husband. She lived together with a man who was younger than her (around 15 years) and was having two children of his. As her stepfather's age matched well with the age of participant 04 (child), he always gave much attention to her and found time to get close to her unnecessarily. *"He had boarded at our home during his higher studies a long time back. Then somehow, he had fallen into an affair with my mother. My mother left my father because of him. My mother's present husband is about 15 years younger than my mother. Now he is interested in me. I feel so uncomfortable when I'm at home. He stares at me all the time and troubles me with sweet talks. He even once proposed to me and says that he wants to marry me"* (p4).

These participants always live with fear even in their homes. In general, the home provides security, belonging, identity, and privacy for all human beings. Thus, participants in the study do not get the above privileges from their homes. As a result of that, these participants (Children) always had a fear that something unpleasant could happen for them inside their houses. They could have become a victim at any time as their parents or other caregivers were already ignorant about their basic needs. Furthermore, the similar situation experienced participant 03 and she explained that she and her younger sister often undergoes harassed by their uncle. Their father had passed away during their childhood and mother was always not at home due to her work. As a result, most of the times both children stayed at home without any protection from the guardian. *"I have an uncle. He is bad. Troubled us a lot. When my mother goes to work, no one was there to protect us. My father is also not here no. One day, it was raining heavily and only my little sister and I were staying at home. Mother also left for work. Grandmother also stays with us, but she is old and has hearing problems. That day, she and I were sleeping. Due to the heavy rain, water was flowing down to our home. Then my uncle came to clean the drains and asked for an umbrella from my little sister. When she gave him an umbrella, he had pulled my sister"*

towards him. She had shouted, but I didn't hear because of the rain" (p3). The above statement shows how her and her sisters had to live in an insecure environment.

According to the parent's interview, some of the participants (parents) do not have their own house. Therefore, they have to save money not only for the food and other expenses but also their house rent. Some of the single parents, they have to work daily to earn money and do not have enough time to spend time with their children and protect them from harm. Considering parent's interview's low income, marital status, low educational level, homeless and jobless status are directly affected to increase the poverty within the family. Due to poverty, parents find it difficult to provide basic needs for their children. According to the children, they have become victims of neglect as they didn't fulfill their basic needs. Among the 134 neglected children, physical neglect is the most common type of child neglect and 53 respondents go under this category, while the cognitive neglect type has the lowest respondents. The respondents that go under Supervision, Emotional and Cognitive neglect are 32, 26, and 23 respectively.

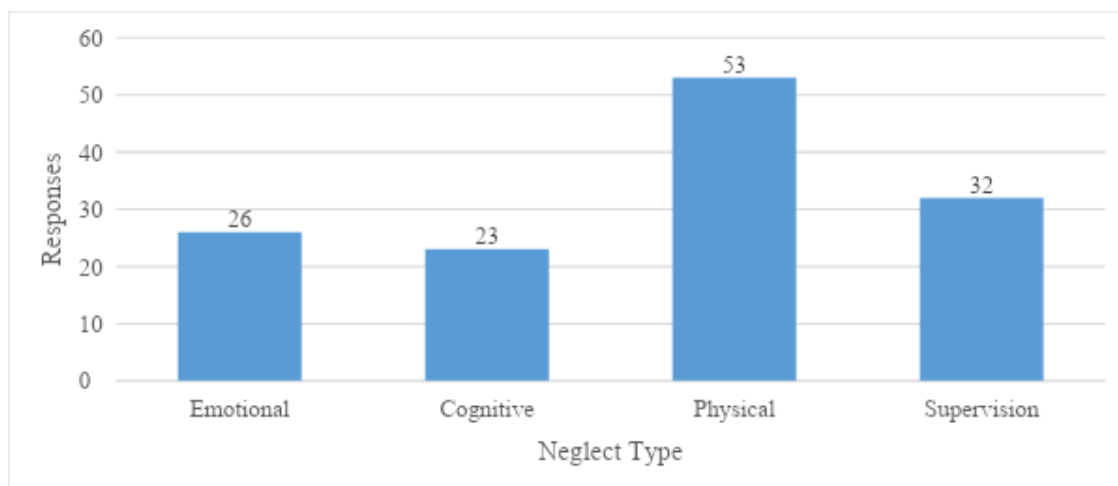


Fig.1: Types of Neglect

Physical neglect is the failure to protect the child from harm or danger and provide the child with basic physical needs such as suitable shelter, food, or clothing (Carter & Myers, 2007). Then, most of the participants in the current study, find difficulties with achieving their basic needs. Further, the researcher emphasized as the second rating category is supervision neglect. It includes lack of appropriate supervision, exposure to hazards, for instance: safety hazards: poisons, small objects, electrical wires, stairs (Ben-David, 2016). Emotional neglect is the lack of care experienced by children when their parents or guardian fail to provide background or environments conducive to their feelings such as being wanted, loved, and worthy (Parkinson, Bromfield, McDougall, & Salveron, 2017). Finally, cognitive neglect is the failure to confirm a child's proper educational needs by the parent or guardian. Fewer amounts of children indicated the victims of cognitive neglect comparing with other neglect categories.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study was conducted to achieve the objective of identifying the impact of poverty on child neglect in the Gampaha district. Although 50 children were recorded as the neglected children in the District Secretariat Office in Gampaha District, the researcher could find 134 neglected children through the snowballing method in the field including Gampaha, Wattala, Ragama, Dompe, Weliveriya, Peliyagoda, Wewellagara, and Kelaniya areas that had not still been recorded to the Divisional secretariat office. Among the 134 neglected children, physical neglect is the most common type of child neglect. While the cognitive neglect type has the lowest respondents. Supervision and emotional neglect rate as the second and third categories respectively. Based on the parent's intention, low income, marital status, low educational level, homeless and jobless status are directly affected to increase the poverty within the family. As a result of poverty, parents suffer from difficulties to provide basic needs for their children.

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*Corresponding author: Himalshi P. Serasinghe

¹(Department of Philosophy, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka)