

# The Impact of Parental Alcoholism on Children's Rights

KTDS Kalansooriya<sup>1#</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Defence and Statigis Studies, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka  
#dkalan297@gmail.com

**Abstract**— Long standing family relationship between parents and child is essential for continues development of children that intern determine the future prospects of young generation. Initial stage of human life everything learns from the parents' actions and behaviours. Thus children's physical and psychological development mostly relies on their parent's actions and reactions. However, the situation has been changed due to expansion of "Parental Alcoholism" which becomes a societal issue. This study focused on effects of parental drinking on children in terms of physiological and psychological functioning in order to identify negative impact that caused extreme social burden to country. A Grama Niladari division area was sampled and total number of 10 families which include 38 members selected with their consent to response the questionnaire. The findings were derived from the discussion with local authorities such as police and Grama Niladari and also through the questionnaire. Collected details were examined using basic tools of Statistical Package for Social Science. During the analysis special consideration was given to children rights such as right to life, right to shelter, right to have safe environment, right to know and cared by his or her parents, right to family life, right to survival, protection, development and participation. Findings indicated that most of these cases were not reported due to fear of social isolation and lack of attention on alcoholism related issues. It was also found that majority of children who are members of these families suffering from physical and mental influences that affect their normal life including the isolation from the society. Hence, this study recommends supporting parents as primary guardians to adopt non-violent, positive parenting and reduce vulnerable situations. Further, recommended to implement the International Child Safeguarding Standards and enacting of Laws and law enforcement.

**Keywords**— Parental Alcoholism, children rights, International Child Safeguarding Standards.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Children are the future of next generation and they will follow their parents/guardians as they grow under their arms and make their own choices as future leaders that shape the entire world order including the behaviours of future generations. According to the Employment of Women, Young Person and Children Act, 1956 in Sri Lanka a person under the age of 14 is considered a 'Child'

and a person between the ages of 14 to 16 a 'Young person'. As per the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a person under 18 years of age is considered a "Child" (UNCRC, 1989).

Parental alcoholism in Sri Lankan context the most common scenario is when husbands are struggling with alcohol addiction. Therefore, it may create detrimental repercussions towards the children especially for

children's rights creating lifetime difficulties. Parental alcoholism can negatively affect on anyone regardless of age, race and gender. This may gradually create socio-economic consequences.

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## II. OUTLINE OF THE PAPER

### A. MAIN PROBLAMATIC AREA OF THE PAPER

In Sri Lanka parental alcoholism has been identified as a common social issue that has created socio-economic consequences short term as well as long term. Considering those consequences most importantly the attention is drawn towards the future generation of the country as they have become the victims of alcoholism of their parents. Therefore, social norms were centred on relationships and long standing social and cultural practices. Moreover, children have no idea whether their rights have been violated even when they are experiencing it. Subsequently, this may lead to personality with negative behaviours and attitudes. On account of these reasons, those incidents where children have been victimized due to parental alcoholism have not been discussed adequately or necessary actions did not materialise to mitigate the same in future. Though children have become victims of alcoholic parents most authorities including the government has given marginally low attention on this as these issues come under domestic violence which should be kept inside having no attention due to the cultural barriers. This is one such phenomenon that the children's rights will be violated unnoticed.

### B. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

Overall objective of this paper is to find out whether parental alcoholism has an impact on Children's Rights. Although many studies have addressed adverse outcomes

in children who were victimised due to alcohol addicted parents, less is known about the possible long-term effects of more regular patterns of parental alcohol consumption. Therefore, this study focuses on following objectives:

To identify children who suffer harms from parents' drinking.

To identify increasing risk of various negative outcomes, such as violence, family separation, teenage pregnancy, mental health problems, poor academic performance, unemployment and becoming dependent on social welfare benefits from a young age.

To analyse possible long-term adverse effects of parental drinking towards children's rights and solutions to overcome the societal issue to some extent.

### C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study pursues to analyse and examine the effects that alcoholism may have on children's rights. As explained in the objective this study attempts in determining whether alcohol or alcohol abuse really has an effect on children. Also is it lead to domestic violence or not. This study will be helpful in numerous ways and instances and it will help those who are still wondering whether or not these two completely different social problems have any relation. In order to get a clear picture, following three questions will be used as a guideline to cover the crucial areas in this research.

How parental alcoholism has a direct impact on children's rights?

What are the short term and long term effects on parental alcoholism towards children's rights?

Is it possible to minimize or overcome the societal issue in association with existing law in the country?

### D. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Sri Lanka as a developing country, alcoholism has been addressed as an activity which has a natural sense to it. In this context, children have become victims of alcoholic parents. However, most authorities including the government has given marginally low attention on this as these issues come under domestic violence which should be kept inside having no attention due to the cultural barriers. Alcohol consumption influences both physical and psychological health which cause abnormalities that may contribute to negative parenting. As a result traditional family centric healthy social practices and values could fade away from future societies.

### E. LIMITATIONS

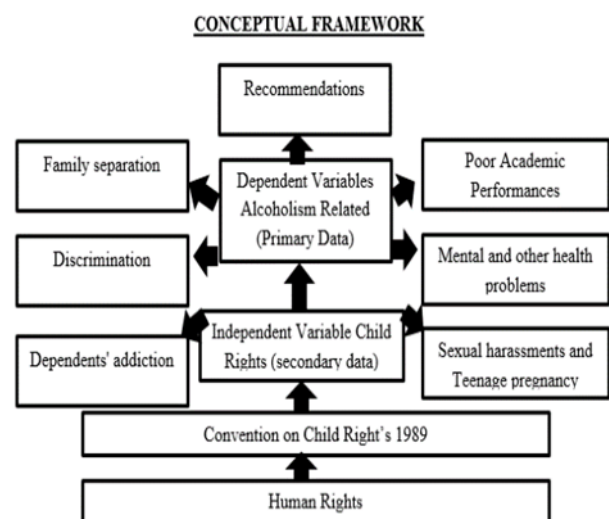
Difficulties in finding target groups, accuracy of data, cultural barriers, lack of participation, time constraints, difficulties to contact relevant expertise and authorities to gather information, reliance on self-reported data, study population and size and lack of qualified specialists are the limitations that obstruct the findings of this study.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is conducted in a selected 212 A Polpihimukalana division in Ja-Ela area. In this study both Qualitative and Quantitative Methods will be used, as it is conducted based on numerical factors and non-numerical factors. Mainly In this study a descriptive method, which is considered as a quantitative method, will be used as it attempts to collect information and statistically analyse it.

### B. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



It was a challenging task to obtain information from particular group of people since the data collection had a direct link with their family concerns. Therefore, combination of random and snowball sampling methods was used through the Grama Niladhari, 212 A Polpihimukalana division in Kadana area. The sample population represents both middle income and low income families.

Permission to carry out the research was obtained from the Grama Niladhari and Police Station, since some of these data revealed the family privacy of respondents and respondents concern obtained prior to data collection.

### C. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS REGIME AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka ratified the Convention of Rights of Child on 12 July 1991. Even long before that children's rights were

protected through traditional laws and cultural practices in Sri Lanka. In that realm some of these domestic violence related to parental alcoholism have been not reflected in those measures adequately. The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) is the principal organisation that advises the government on the necessary policies and laws to prevent child abuses and the protection and treatment of children who are victims of such abuse and the co-ordination and monitoring of action against all forms of child abuse.

On the other side Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment is also responsible for assisting the government in the formulation of policies in relation to the Women and Child Development. Both these establishments are closely working with many local and international stakeholders to protect children's rights. In that The NCPA is closely working with the international organisations that are functioning on behalf of children such as UNICEF, Save the Children, Child Fund and World Vision.

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

##### A. DISCUSSION

Details of the findings and the analysis of the same have been carried out focusing on following three considerations:

Effects of parental alcoholism on family relationships and its impact on children rights such as right to life, right to shelter, right to have a safe environment, right to know and be cared by his or her parents and right to family life.

Socioeconomic and health issues associated with Parental Alcoholism and its effects on children's rights such as right to survival, protection, development and participation.

Effects on child development, future prospects and its impact on children's rights.

##### B. REPORTED CASES AND RELATED DATA

At the very first stage of selecting the sample, required details were obtained from the Kandana Police station to identify the particular Grama Niladari division. According to the records of police station, it was found that the police have categorised related issues as reported cases, family fights, children's cases, spouse leaving the house, minor assault, cases proceed to court and other complains. In general, findings revealed that on average 25 cases related to domestic violence were reported due to alcoholism. Consequently, most children of these houses were harassed mentally and physically depriving their right to have a safe family life and shelter. Also, most of them become dependents on social welfare benefits from a young age.

**Gender Related Details.** Composition of 10 families in 212 A Polpihimukalana division, includes 39 members. In that 23 of them are female respondents (parents and children) which is 59% of the total sample, of which 11 of them are children and another 3 elderly children. Altogether, there are 20 children, but 6 of them have passed the age of 18 and could not be considered as children as per the definition explained in chapter one. The study showed a more tendency of the age group of 27 to 35 on alcoholism/drug addiction. Also, the study indicates that elderly respondents (father and mother of the selected families) are within 26 to 57 years of age. 50% of them are between 30 to 43 years of age. The age of the husband and wife of the youngest family in the selected population are 28 and 27 years respectively in which both of them are drug addicted persons. The age of the husband and the wife of the oldest family are 52 and 50 years of respectively. Oldest mother who is 57 years old is living with her 4 children after the demise of his husband. Her elder son is addicted to alcohol and he disturbs other children's education and wellbeing. Above details indicate that alcoholism has spread among all age groups in material of their gender. All the facts derived above have a direct or indirect connection with use of alcohol. As a whole children of 5 years and above include elderly children suffering from the consequences of parental alcoholism. Thereby, most of child respondents' right to survival, protection, development, participation right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

**Level of Education.** Since the previous studies were highlighted the relationship between the level of education and alcoholic behaviours, the study focused on the level of education of both respondents in the selected families. As per the received details, only 4 respondents' educational level is below the GCE O/L. Educational level of 7 mothers and 8 Fathers is above GCE O/L including 4 graduates. However, they do not pay much attention to their child education that leads to poor academic performances. According to the above findings alcohol addiction is common with the all people with different levels of education. Yet it is necessary to find the way that they respond to their dependents after getting drunk, as the way they respond directly affects the children's physical and cognitive development. Following comparison describes parents' educational level in the selected sample.

**Income and Economic Conditions of Families.** The study indicates that the majority of them are employees in the private sector, which amounts to 62.5% while 31.3% employed in the government sector. Only one person is employed overseas. Two out of 3 executives are employed in the private sector while the other is a government servant and they earn above Rs 96000.00 monthly salary. Others are 5 clericals with Rs 36000.00 to 55000.00 monthly salary, 3 office assistants and 4 labourers earn Rs 15000.00 to 35000.00 monthly salaries.

Five parents are not employed, which includes one father and four mothers. But three children above 18 years are also employed. Accordingly, 16 respondents out of 39 are employed including 3 adult children. According to the following table at least one parent in each house is

employed to earn money for family behalf. According to these responses, it indicates that above 70% of families could not ensure the right to living in standard way adequate for the child's all round improvement including physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

**Alcoholism Related Information.** Study revealed that fathers at every house drink alcohol while 2 mothers and an adult son are consuming alcohol in these 10 houses. Accordingly, 11 parents and an adult child are involved with drinking alcohol or use of drugs in these houses. As a results children's right for adequate living standard that ensures child's physical, mental, moral, spiritual, and social development have been deprived. Above details itself indicate lack of financial support for child education and other basic needs where his rights are violated. The study revealed following details related to respondents' involvement in drinking:

According to the information received they have different preferences based on their likings and economic conditions etc. The study indicates that approximately 42 % consume both local and foreign liquor. It is also clear that a considerable percentage (25%) amounts to consume moonshine.

Study discovered following drinking patterns which are detrimental to the wellbeing of their families. Most of them are addicted to alcohol and daily consumers. In that, approximately 42% drink outside their houses while 33% inside the house and 25 % drink in Bars. The study further revealed that most children stay silent against parents' drinking. This resulted in many mental health issues within their children specially related to PTSD. That indicates that their right to freedom of expression, association and right to freedom of peaceful assembly have been deprived due to parental alcoholism. Finding indicates that about 83.3% are consuming liquor daily which is not manageable by their salaries due to the economic conditions of these families.

As per the information that they were reluctant to disclose, one girl below the age of 15 become a victim being sexually assaulted by one of his father's friends after being intoxicated while drinking in their house. In the youngest family, the wife was subjected to teenage pregnancy when she was 16 after being intoxicated. Also, the case was not reported due to drug addiction.

Then a study was carried out to find the reasons for alcoholism of parents/elders and it indicates that the majority of them about 42% drinking for enjoyment. 33% are addicted and approximately 25% use alcohol to escape from their problem.

Even though most of them are aware about socioeconomic consequences of alcoholism they consider it as an integral part of their life that is essential for them to get short term relief from certain circumstances. Individual behaviours also change from time to time depending on the volume of alcohol that they use.

The survey also found that about 80% of the sample spends more than 60% of their income on alcohol. Notably two

executives, a husband and wife whose children have grown and living separately, are addicted to the alcohol excessively. Although they have some health issues they are reluctant to accept that these issues are consequences of alcohol misuse. Hence, they also spend more than 90% of their income on alcohol and medication. On the other hand, the youngest family in this sample is addicted to alcohol and drugs due to their parents' alcohol misuse. This family is also facing many legal issues including detention. Even their child was born while the mother was in detention. Not only is that, most addicted parents suffering from digestive diseases and injuries. Since Sri Lanka provides free health service most of these addicted individuals are not afraid of such diseases. They are also aware but they do not worry about the long term effects considering short term satisfaction. This could affect children in many ways such as loss of their parents in young age, become dependents on social welfare projects etc. In the above discussed sample also 6 families depend on government offered welfare projects and other charity works.

Some details on harsh experiences related to sexual miss behaviours of intoxicated parents were disclosed by a child who is afraid of his farther. Although, this study did not directly focuses on the relationship between alcoholism and sexual misconduct, the discovered facts indicate its relationship with children's psychological development. This kind of issue needs special attention from responsible authorities in order to protect children's right to have safe and decent shelter.

These issues indicate the family history of all these 10 families, which have issues related to parental Alcoholism. As a whole, a child has a right to have a safe environment has been disturbed due to prenatal alcoholism in the 212 A Polpihimukalana division at Kadana.

### C. ANALYSIS

Every child has a right to food, housing, proper medical care, education and freedom as per United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Moreover, children have a right to feel safe regardless of their situation. Accomplishment of children's right enables them to take an active role in their security against exploitation, violence and abuse, and to become valuable citizens. Yet girls and boys in every country, in every culture and at every social level face forms of abuse, neglect, mistreatment and violence. In Sri Lanka it is the same. However, in the recent past the consumption of alcohol has rapidly expanded due to various reasons such as emotional challenges people face recently with the economic crisis, to escape from problems, to get inner peace, self-satisfaction and for social recognition.

In the field of children's rights protection, the efforts done by institutes, authorities are considered as most valued efforts as they are acting according to the specified laws which citizens obey without questioning the validity of the same. Moreover, these institutes participate in solving problematic situations directly.