

## **Harmonizing Tradition and Child Welfare: The Ordination of Buddhist Child Monks in Sri Lanka**

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In Sri Lanka, where a majority follows the Theravada Buddhism, there are rituals and norms related to the ordination of monks, as well as a process of certification of ordination. Authors are highlighting issues with possible recommendations for this process, especially considering the child monks by presenting a case where the monk has been produced for clinical forensic examination (CFE) with an alleged history of physical abuse. The CFE of an 8-year-old male novice monk revealed soft tissue lesions, and some of them were compatible with the given history of physical assault by fellow monks, and the other lesions were benign. Further investigation revealed that he has not undergone the proper process of ordination, including probation period and certification of ordination. Furthermore, this monk had been moved from temple to temple by his father bypassing accepted practice while keeping the monk under his custody, citing various reasons. Subsequently, de-robing was performed according to the decision of a multi-disciplinary team and the custody of the child was granted to the father under observation of probationary care to monitor the safety, welfare, and education. This case highlights the deficiencies in the process of ordaining/de-robing novices from the existing system in Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The authors present several suggestions for safeguarding the welfare of child monks while supporting the norms and traditions of the priesthood. These include setting a minimum age limit for ordination, granting 3-6 months of compulsory probationary period before ordination, developing a process to assess whether ordination and de-robing are done according to the religious law, notifying regional child welfare officials on de-robed child monks and children whose probationary period was unsatisfactory, developing an easily-accessible online database, and decentralizing the registration centers.

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