

ENHANCING CHILD-CENTRIC JUSTICE SYSTEM: CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND LESSONS FOR SRI LANKA

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Sri Lanka has set out to create a legal framework that prioritises children's rights and welfare within the judicial system, in line with the global movement towards child-friendly justice systems. The legal framework in Sri Lanka encompasses several statutes addressing matters within the realm of juvenile justice, child victims, and children who conflict with the law, such as the Children and Young Persons Ordinance 1939, Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act, No. 10 of 2023, and the Youthful Offenders (Training Schools) Ordinance. Furthermore, Sri Lanka became a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, affirming its commitment to upholding children's rights. The objectives of this research are to comprehensively analyse the legal framework of Sri Lanka and the multifaceted legal and practical challenges impeding the realisation of this crucial goal and to propose strategies to overcome these challenges and enhance the justice system's child-centric nature. Utilising a qualitative research approach, this research collected secondary data from diverse outlets, encompassing legislative documents, scholarly articles, legal precedents, and in-depth expert interviews. The study's key findings indicate that although Sri Lanka's legal framework incorporates provisions to establish a justice system favourable to children, there is a need to revise outdated laws and conquer practical challenges to secure the full spectrum of children's rights within the justice system. The study reveals that in addition to antiquated laws, numerous practical challenges impede the establishing of a child-friendly justice system in Sri Lanka. These challenges include delays in court procedures, inadequate training for officials handling cases involving children, unethical media practices, the ineffective functioning of the juvenile court system, and the absence of comprehensive data on juvenile offenders and child victims. The study puts forth several strategies to address these challenges, including the introduction of a structured counselling system, the implementation of measures to alleviate case delays, providing a comfortable environment for child testimony in court, and the initiation of an awareness program designed to promote understanding and awareness of juvenile delinquency.

Keywords: Child, Justice system, Obstacles, Rights, Strategies