

ABSTRACT

Assessment of Government Healthcare Facilities in Kandy District for Managing Children with Disabilities

Introduction

Children with disabilities (CWD) are a group requiring specialized healthcare services for early diagnosis and prompt intervention through multidisciplinary teams to support their development. Sri Lanka has introduced several programmes, including the Inclusive Early Childhood Development Programme (IncluDe), through child development clinics. This study assessed the healthcare facilities available in government healthcare institutions in Kandy District for managing children with disabilities from both caregiver and care provider perspectives, aiming to identify existing gaps and barriers in service provision.

Method

A descriptive cross-sectional mixed-methods study was conducted from October 2025 to March 2026 in four government healthcare institutions with a CDC in Kandy District. Data were collected using a facility checklist, key informant interview guide, and interviewer-administered questionnaire from three populations: healthcare institutions with functioning child development clinics, healthcare professionals who actively participate for more than one year in the functioning of the clinic and caregivers of clinic-registered CWD. One hundred caregivers participated according to the sample size calculation, of whom 98 were analyzed with descriptive statistics.

Socio-demographic characteristics, perception of available facilities and challenges and barriers faced are described. One-way ANOVA was performed on mean waiting time and mean household income between caregivers with poor and good perceptions of the overall experience. Qualitative data collected for from sixteen care providers until data saturation, and were analyzed thematically.

Results

Maternal caregiving predominated (98%). Most were (75.5%) unemployed and from low-income households (<Rs. 50,000; 61.2%). Among the children, 65.3% were male, and 67.3% were born preterm. Facility availability was suboptimal, with only one institution scoring 65.62% and others 43.75%, reflecting critical gaps in Infrastructure ($\leq 28.6\%$), service-specific factors (0%), and caregiver support (16.7%). Care providers highlighted shortages of dedicated trained staff, professional training, and multi-disciplinary care facilities. Overall perceived experience was rated good by 56.1% and poor by 34.7%. Waiting time ($p=0.606$) and income ($p=0.206$) did not influence caregivers' perceived experience level. Administrative difficulties (62.2%), financial constraints (54%) and distance (50.5%) were key barriers.

Conclusion

The study highlights the necessity of strengthening disability-inclusive healthcare services by improving infrastructure, multidisciplinary care, capacity building, collaborative services, and caregiver support. It provides important insights for policymakers, healthcare administrators, and future researchers.

Key words: Children with disabilities; Disability inclusive healthcare; Caregiver experience; Healthcare facility assessment