

Parents' Perception of Buddhist Dhamma School Education and Social Hazards Mitigation among Children and Youth in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

A hazard is any potential threat faced by human society due to natural or man-made events (Smith, 2013). Man-made hazards negatively influence social development where children and youth are considered a significant part of any society. Normally, children are considered under 18, and youth are considered ages 15-29. The statistics of admissions to prisons of young people in Sri Lanka show an increasing trend. Many of them were admitted to prison due to misbehaviour such as the use of drugs, alcohol, crime, bullying, etc. (Prison Statistics, 2025). This kind of misbehaviour has increased among children and youth in Sri Lanka massively in the recent past (Dayasiri et al., 2026; Senanayake et al., 2018). Social learning theory explains that children learn through the process of observation, imitation, reinforcement and social environment (Razieth, and Mohammad, 2011). Education significantly contributes to reducing social hazards among young people. Especially, Buddhist Dhamma school education contributes to enhance the moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social qualities of the teenagers, but the participation of students in Dhamma School is declining rapidly, which negatively affects the students' ability to enhance their religious moral values such as compassion, loving-kindness, honesty, non-violence, generosity, respect, self-discipline, mindfulness, responsibility, etc. (Bhikkhu, 2010). Hence, young people lacking these qualities tend to be undergone to various anti-social behavior creating many social hazards which directly affect sustainable development. With this context, the researcher attempted to examine below objectives.

Objectives

The general objective of this research was to analyze parents' perception of Buddhist Dhamma school education and social hazards mitigation among children and youth in Sri Lanka where the researcher attempted to identify the major social hazards affecting children and youth, examine the factors affecting students' participation in Buddhist Dhamma Schools, recognize values gain due to Dhamma school and contribution to mitigate social hazards among children and youth and suggest strategies for enhancing Buddhist Dhamma education in Sri Lanka for achieving Sustainment Development.

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Methodology

This research adopted a mixed research approach to analyse the aforesaid objectives, where both primary and secondary data were used to achieve the research objectives. To collect primary data, a structured questionnaire was prepared using Google form and the questions were included five point likert scale answers ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree to measure the perceptions of parents and identify the factors affecting non-participation of students in Buddhist Dhamma School. Short answer and open-ended questions were included to identify respondents' background and their detailed perception of student participation in Dhamma School and mitigation of social hazards among children and youth in Sri Lanka. The target population was composed of the parents of school-aged children in Sri Lanka, and a total of 50 parents participated in the survey as the sample. The survey was conducted in April 2026. The questionnaire was distributed using social media and other digital communication platforms. This research used a non-probability convenience sampling technique to allow respondents from different districts of Sri Lanka to participate conveniently, and the participation was voluntary; respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and maintained the confidentiality through the research process. The collected data were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods, where central tendency measures, percentages, descriptive statistics, and exploratory factor analysis were performed using SPSS software and thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. The results were presented mainly as text, tables, and graphs.

Results

The first research objective was to identify what social hazards are prevalent among the children and youth of Sri Lanka. The researcher found the major social hazards through the literature review and checked the parents' perception of identified social hazards among children and youth. Table 1 shows that the most critical issues among current generations where prevalence of drug use, is a serious issue 88% of parents agree with the statement. The use of alcohol is also increasing among young people (84%). Internet addiction is another massive problem among young people, which leads to health issues and wasting time, and it has negatively influenced their education. The prevalence of this kind of misbehaviour directly negatively affects the development of children and youth; finally, misbehaviour of the children and youth adversely affects personal life and overall development of the society.

Table: 01 Parents' perception on social misbehaviour among children and youth in Sri Lanka

Social misbehavior among children and youth in Sri Lanka	Agreement %	Rank
The prevalence of drug use is increasing.	88	1
The use of alcohol is increasing.	84	2
Internet addiction is a major problem	81	3
Child abuse is a serious problem.	77	4
The prevalence of mental health problems is increasing	73	5
Respect for teachers is decreasing	73	6
Smoking has become common among youth.	72	7
The incidence of cyberbullying is increasing.	72	8
The incidence of online exploitation has increased.	70	9
Incidents of school violence have increased	67	10
The level of aggressive behavior has increased	67	11
Young people do not respect elders	67	12
The incidence of juvenile delinquency is increasing.	63	13
There is no religious orientation	60	14
Bullying is a common problem.	56	15
Attempts to commit suicide	56	16
Peer pressure contributes to risky behaviours.	53	17
School absenteeism is increasing	48	18
The rate of school dropout is increasing.	44	19

Source: Survey data, 2026

Second objectives was to analyze parents' perception on values generate through the Buddhist Dhamma school education where parents thoroughly believe that Buddhist Dhamma school contribute to develop positive attitudes of the children and youth such as enhancing religious activities(74%), respect parent(70%), community service(70%), kindness and compassion (69%), decision making(69%), respect teachers(67%), moral values(67%), respect society(65%), discipline(62%), responsibility(62%), resolve conflicts(60%), honesty(58%), emotional control (58%) and reduce or avoid aggressive behavior(65%), violent behavior(65%), social risks(63%), deal with bad friends(60%), drug use(53%), alcohol use(53%), and smoking (53%).

Table: 02: Factors affecting non-participation of students to Dhamma School in Sri Lanka

Rotated Components Matrix	Components			
	1	2	3	4
Dhamma School Educational Quality and Attractiveness (Cronbach's Alpha =0.943)				
Dhamma school teaching is not attractive to students.	0.930			
The quality of teaching by Dhamma school teachers is inadequate.	0.912			
Learning activities are not interesting to children	0.918			
The Dhamma school environment is not attractive	0.853			
The facilities provided by the Dhamma school are inadequate	0.636			
The class schedule is not suitable for children	0.822			
Dhamma school activities are not suitable for modern children	0.611			
There is no adequate publicity/awareness.	0.647			
Low community involvement decreases participation	0.578			
Time Constraints and External Influence Barriers (Cronbach's Alpha=0.893)				
Students do not have enough time due to school studies (O/L and A/L).		0.711		
Tuition classes reduce attendance at Dhamma school		0.784		
Time is wasted due to social media use.		0.787		
Attendance at Dhamma school decreases due to peer influence		0.802		
Family Support and Institutional Commitment Barriers(Cronbach's Alpha=0.890)				
Parents are not interested in sending their children to Dhamma school.			0.635	
Children do not receive support because of their parents' busy schedules.			0.914	
A lack of religious activities within the family decreases participation in Dhamma school.			0.861	
Children are not interested in attending Dhamma school.			0.609	
The government does not take steps to improve Dhamma school education			0.576	
Economic and Accessibility Barriers(Cronbach's Alpha= 0.823)				
Family financial problems make it difficult to attend Dhamma school.				0.664
It is difficult to attend Dhamma school due to distance				0.821
Lack of transport facilities is a problem				0.792
Note: Extraction Method: Principal; component analysis Rotation: Varimax				
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy=.734,Approx. Chi-Square=889.676				
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: df 210, Sig..000				

Source: Survey data, 2026

According to parents' perception on the significance of Dhamma School to mitigate social hazards among children and youth, where the majority (44%) strongly agree, 33% of parents agree, 21% moderately agree, and only 2% disagree with the close relation between Dhamma School education and social hazards, respectively. The third objective was to find the factors affecting non-participation of students in Dhamma School. The explanatory factor analysis was performed based on the perception of parents, where, though the sample size is small (n=50), according to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy, the KMO value was.734, which is accepted, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant(P=.000) and $\chi^2 = 889.676$ df=210. Therefore, basic requirements were fulfilled, and Exploratory Factor Analysis was performed. Factors were derived using principal component analysis using 21 items, and four main factors were identified based on the factor loading. Table 2 illustrates the four factors and their items. The reliability was identified using Cronbach's Alpha, which ranged from 0.943 to 0.823; this means internal consistency reliability ranges from good to excellent. According to factor analysis, four factors mainly affect non-participation of students in Dhamma schools. Hence, Dhamma School

educational quality and attractiveness, Time constraints and external influence barriers, Family support and institutional commitment barriers and Economic and accessibility barriers are the major reasons for non-participation of students in Dhamma Schools in Sri Lanka. Further, it was found that the most dominant factor was the Dhamma School educational quality and attractiveness based on the highest percentage of total variance (46.8%).

Conclusions

The research findings highlighted that present young generations have undergone various social hazards. To mitigate social hazards among children and youth, Buddhist Dhamma School education plays a vital role in mitigating misbehaviour of the young people because Buddhist Dhamma School education helps to enhance the moral, spiritual, and social values that need to shape healthy social development. However, student participation in Sunday Buddhist Dhamma School has been rapidly declining due to various factors. Four main factors were identified: lack of Dhamma School educational quality and attractiveness; time constraints and external influence barriers; family support and institutional commitment barriers; and economic and accessibility barriers. There is a close relationship between youth misbehaviour and non-participation in Dhamma School. Hence, it is time to address the four identified causes to enhance the quality of the Buddhist Dhamma school education, mitigate potential social hazards and contribute to achieving Sustainable Development of the country.

Keywords - Buddhist Dhamma school education, Children's misbehaviour, Social hazards, Sustainable Development, Sri Lanka

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