

## USE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT BY SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN EDUCATIONAL ZONE, KURUNEGALA.

B H Angammana<sup>1</sup>, M H N Tharangani<sup>2</sup>, R N H M D Jayarathna<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Open University of Sri Lanka, <sup>2</sup>Zonal Education Office, Kurunegala

<sup>3</sup>Ku/Katupitiya Vidyalaya, Indulgodakanda  
<sup>1</sup>arrang@ou.ac.lk, <sup>2</sup>deejayarathna@gmail.com,  
<sup>3</sup>mhntharangani@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT** - School students are special as passengers; if with special needs, it must be extremely special. In the present research the main objective is to identify issues faced by school students with special needs (SSSN) in using public transport (PT). Other specific objectives are to identify the actions taken by public transport service providers (PTSP) and to make recommendations to provide a safer mode of PT for SSSN. Three Special Education Units in Kurunegala zone were selected; sample group included 34 parents of SSSN who use PT and of 14 PTSP. Interviews were done with parents and PTSP, a focused group discussion was done with parents to confirm all qualitative data. Using PT with low confidence was identified with a belief that PTSP are unable to deal with SSSN fairly among normal passengers. Existing actions of PTSP towards SSSN were limited, negligible and trivial concerns. PTSP must be informed effectively on how to deal with SSSN and related passengers. It's fair if there's a possibility to count SSSN and guardian in one cost. As there are many issues on SSSN in PT, all responsible eyes must open with an intention to provide a safer PT to SSSN.

**Keywords:** Guardian; Passengers; Students with special needs

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The anonymous saying, "A developed country is not a place where the poor have cars, it's where the rich ride public transportation" proves that public transportation of a country is an index of development. As the term 'public' refers 'connected with ordinary people in society in general' [1], the reality of "public transport service" must be fairly connected to all members of the society. In Sri Lanka, there are many public transport service providers owned by both private and state sector such as bus, train, school van, trishaw, boat, etc. In general sense, irrespective of all social and biological differences, more people are turning to use public transport nowadays especially due to economic crisis. Even though Sri Lanka has almost adequate numbers of fleet in each public transport modes, they do not have sufficient facilities for differently abled people [2]. In such a situation, students with special needs (SSSN) are especially considerable section of public passengers as in an environment of where the school students are being cared as passengers in many ways by the governments through years. Although there are considerable number of constitutional conditions and steps such as CTB and railway season tickets, school bus service provided by CTB, concessional bus fare with the "Sisu Sariya" service, guidelines for the vehicles of PTSP regarding the transportation of school children, unfortunately they are not even slightly refer to issues of SSSN. Some limited number of studies on this field highlights physical needs of the vehicles and other related infrastructure. But under the public transportation of SSSN there are psychological and economical concerns in addition to physical provisions to be overcome. In Australia and most of the European continent, dedicated transport services are provided to students with special needs, free of charge or at concessional rate [3]. Many above mentioned actions implemented in Sri Lanka are similar with European applications, but their rich concern towards SSSN is not yet considered here, is problematic. Within such a context a study was inspired to conduct with some personal and common experiences.

### 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To widely get close to the hidden realities, experience, and related attitudes, the researchers used interviews as the main data collection tool. There were two major types of respondents. They were

passengers and PTSP. The role of the passengers was represented by two characters: the SSSN and the guardian. Because of the parents are extremely more sensible about their children's experience and feelings, to overcome the practical barriers to carry out interviews with SSSN, and to keep the reliability of the data, only the parents of SSSN were interviewed first as passengers. Secondly the PTSP were interviewed. Finally, to confirm and, for further clarification of the data, the researchers conducted a focused group discussion with the parents of SSSN of the sample. The purposive sampling method was used to select the sample. Three Special Education Units in Kurunegala were selected; namely Sri Nissanka School, Maliyadeva Model School and Sir John Kothalawala School as they represent the majority of SSSN who transport daily in Kurunegala education zone. From the whole 65 parents, all the 34 who use PT were selected as passengers of the sample while 14 PTSP of them were the rest of the sample; included 02 CTB bus drivers, 02 CTB bus conductors, 03 private bus drivers, 03 private bus conductors, 02 school service van drivers and 02 school service van assistants. The public bus service (Both private and CTB) and school van service were the PTSP that applied by the passenger party of the selected sample. This limitation was present due to the geographical location of the study area. The SSSN nature of the sample was 04 students with deaf and 30 students with mental impairments. Furthermore, ethically the work was cleared by not mentioning any privacy and not exposing any unwilling factors of the respondents in the document.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of 48% SSSN who don't use PT, 81% parents refuse it due to lack of confidence. Although 52% use PT with their parents or a trustful guardian, of them 60% parents use it with low confidence, as they don't have any ability to do other thing. It was identified that the most important "Confidence" factor of the passenger in PT is desperately needed by SSSN and equally their parents. There is no confidence to the parents to send SSSN alone in PT as they believe that PTSP are unable to deal with SSSN properly. More than the physical relief the mental relief is requested regarding SSSN. If PTSP can cost both parent and a SSSN as a single unit, it will be an economical relief to them. the reactions of other passengers, welcome and care of PTSP are the crucial considerations that SSSN are influenced. The knowledge of PTSP about SSSN is seen very low, problematic, and confused. Though some valuable steps such as "Sisu Seriya" are positively applicable towards the betterment of SSSN, there are no directly targeted steps for SSSN yet regarding PT.

### 4. CONCLUSION

"Where the PT is broken, the education starts to break" is a visualized reality at present. The PT of SSSN seems broken in many ways and suitable applications are not seen yet. If the responsible PT authorities pay attention to providing a safer mode of transportation to SSSN it will be a start of providing a greater mode of education on them.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Here by we acknowledge all parents of SSSN who inspired us to conduct such a study and provided their sensitive information without any hesitation.

### REFERENCES

1. Wehmeier, S., et al., (2005). Oxford Advanced Learner, Oxford university Press, Oxford New York.
2. Mampearachchi, W.K and Suman, S, (2014). Usability of Public Transport for Differently abled People in Sri Lanka, *Engineer* - Vol. XLVII, No. 02, pp. [47-55]
3. Kumara, A.S, Kandanaarachchi, T., Karunaratne, A., (2022). Review of the "Sisu Seriya" school bus service Volume 2 Issue 1 *JSALT* 2.1.SP: pp. 115-134
4. Tennakoon, V., et al (2020). Transport equity in Sri Lanka: Experiences linked to disability and older age, *Journal of Transport and Health* 18:100913