

Children with Disabilities and Discrimination

Introduction

Cambodia is one of the least developed countries in Asia and has passed through a recent history of violence, war and poverty. However, the first decade of the 21st century has seen positive economical growing and reconstruction. The country still striving with many consequence of a post-war period such as widows, orphans, epidemics, human trafficking and people experiencing trauma and the children/people with disabilities.

Children with disabilities are one of the most marginalized and excluded groups of children. Discrimination arises not as a result of the intrinsic nature of children with disabilities, but rather, as a consequence of lack of understanding and knowledge of its causes and implications, fear of difference, fear of contagion or contamination, or negative religious or cultural views of disability.

Purpose/Objective of study

- To raise awareness of the special needs and understand the stigma of children with disabilities by the families and local communities.
- To help the community to understand the value of these children and help to transform adult's mindset and work towards the end of stigmatizing children with disabilities.
- The main focus is to involve the family and people in the communities to provide the children the safe environment to grow healthy. Furthermore, it is also to improve a good relationship between the family and the people in their communities.

Primary research questions

- 1- What forms of discrimination do families of children with disabilities face?
- 2- How does the discrimination affect the children and the families?
3. How does the children and families respond to the stigma and discrimination due to the children with disabilities?
- 4- What the source of stigmatizing behavior Or Who are stigmatizing the children?
5. How can families be helped and how can we reduce the stigmatization?

Study area and population studied

Safe Haven Medical Outreach

Safe Haven's mission is to provide intervention and support for children with disabilities and complex medical problems, allowing them the opportunity to access the medical and therapeutic resources they need to reach their full potential, lead healthy lives, and reach their highest level of personal independence.

Methods

- i. The focus population and individuals selected for interviews was determined through discussions with the Country Director and the staff at Safe Haven.
- ii. Ten parents from ten families were chosen from among the Safe Haven Medical Outreach clients and ten Community religious leaders.

iii. One on one structured interviews were conducted with those selected from the target population. Ten standardized open-ended questions were asked.

iv. Interviews took place over two months from October-November 2016.

Background Research

Karma is a concept encountered in several Eastern religions, although having different meanings. Teachings about karma explain that our past actions affect us, either positively or negatively, and that our present actions will affect us in the future.

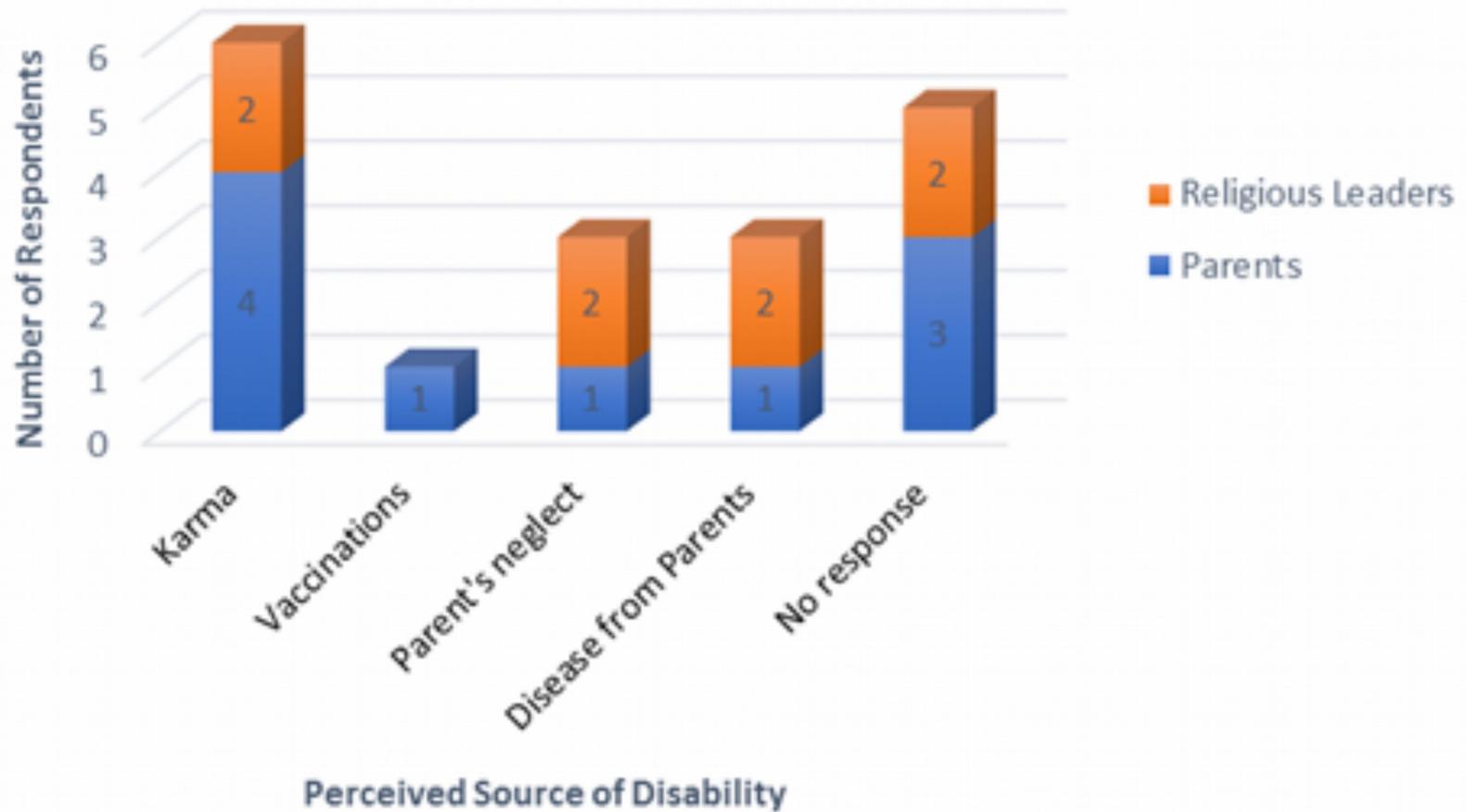
Buddhism uses an agricultural metaphor to explain how sowing good or bad deeds will result in good or bad fruit (phala; or vipāka, meaning 'ripening').

Secondary data

Throughout Southeast Asia, parents have the sense of responsibility take care of children with disabilities (Based upon the research of Gammeltoft).

"In this secondary research in Hanoi, parents with children having disabilities, visualize and define the personal feelings of their children in ways that were filled with something undesirable with a situation in which inconsistent: while insisting with a heartfelt and powerful intensity on the humanity of their children and caring for them with love. Most parents also described their children as pitiful; as being of less value than others and as a heavy burden on their families."

Perceptions of How Children Become Disabled



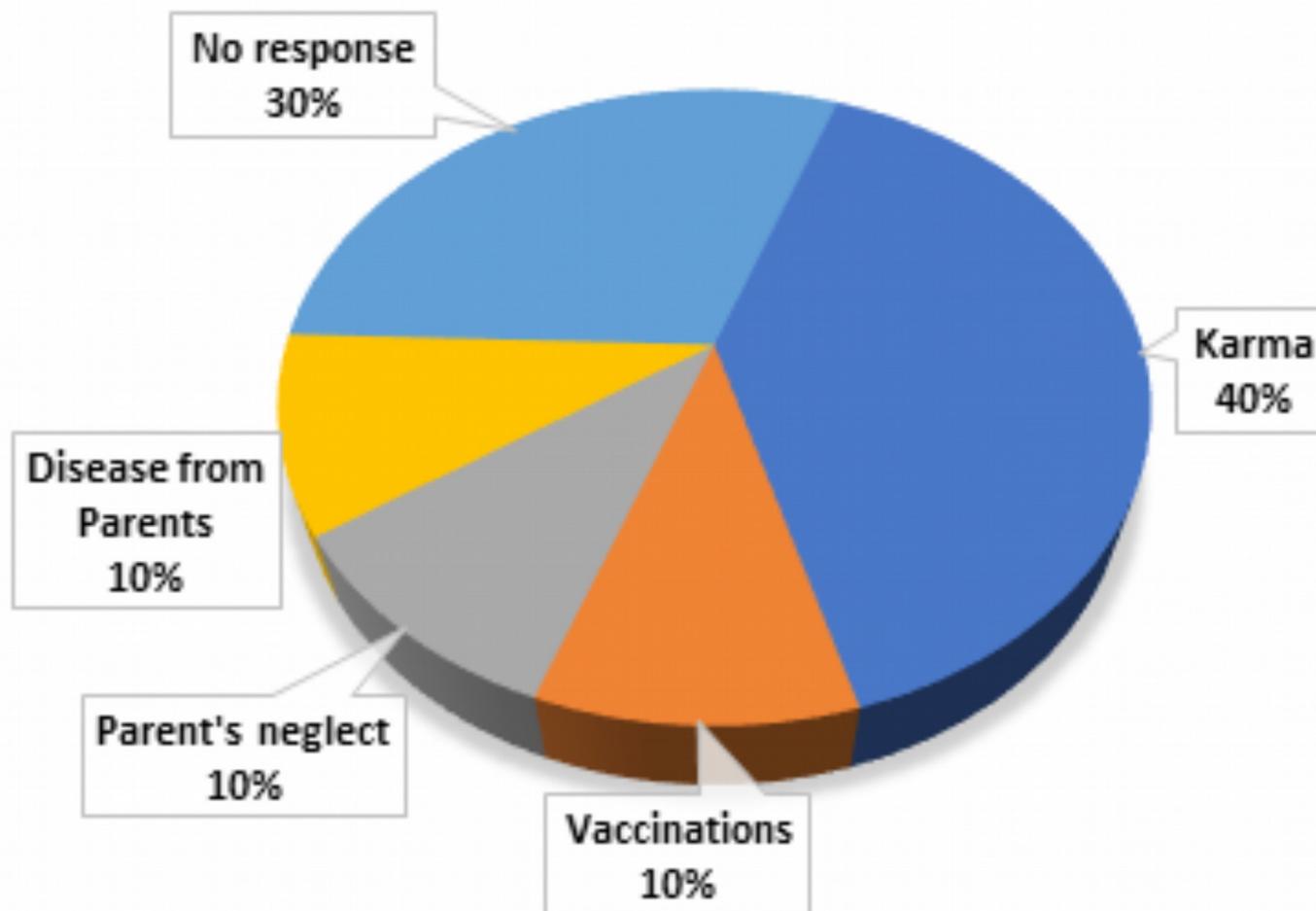
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A mother of a child with disability, “Some people they criticize my son when they see him as a child without the limb and they said that “Your son is disabled, so just make him beg for money from the people and he doesn't need to go to school”. Some other people said that **“He has Karma from the previous life and that's why he lost his both legs”**.

Grandmother of one child with disability said “When I brought my grandson to Kuntha Bopha Children's Hospital (KBH), the doctor said that this type of diagnosis cannot be treated as it is **his Karma from the previous life**. The doctor also said to grandma that “Please take care of your grandson at home and do your best, if the doctor does surgery it might put the child in a dangerous and life threatening situation, so it is better to take care of him at home and let his destiny determine his life”.

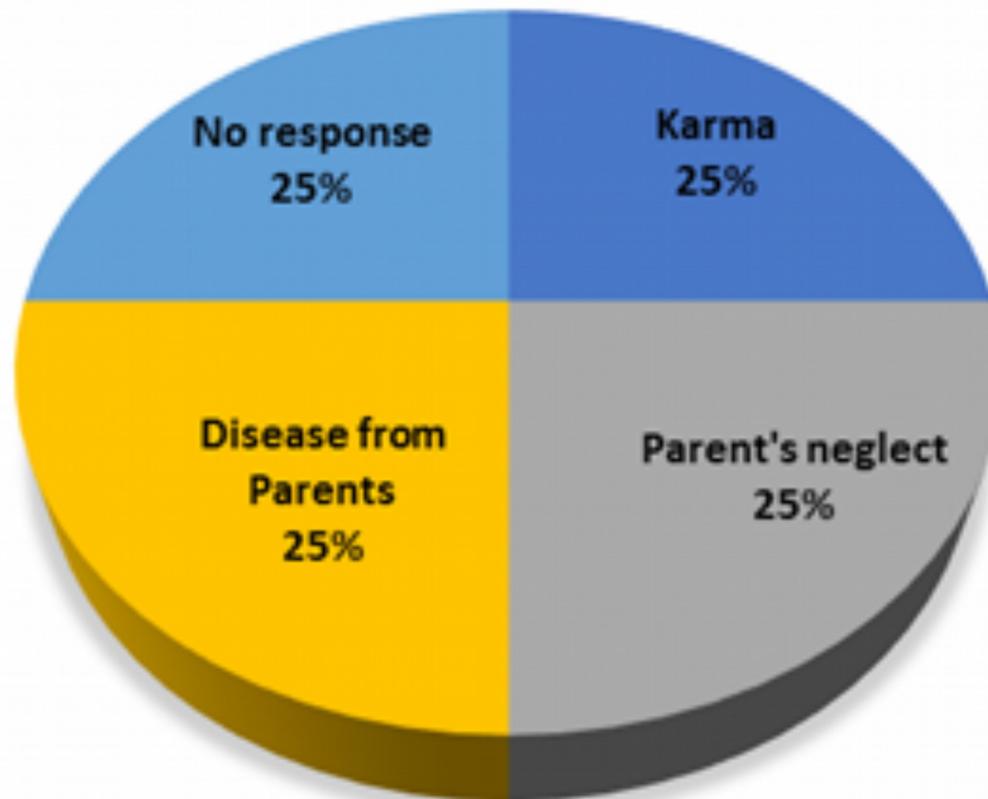
Two religious leaders believed that “Karma” caused the children become disabled as following the interviewed:
“From my believe and following the Buddhist's teaching “You get what you did or **Karma**”.

Parent's Perceptions of How Children Become Disabled



Parents believed “Karma” is responsible to the children with disabilities which is Fatalistic attitude while another 20% of other parents has at least taking responsibilities toward how the children became disabled (10% Disease from parents and another 10% Parent's neglect).

Religious Leaders' Perceptions of How Children Become Disabled



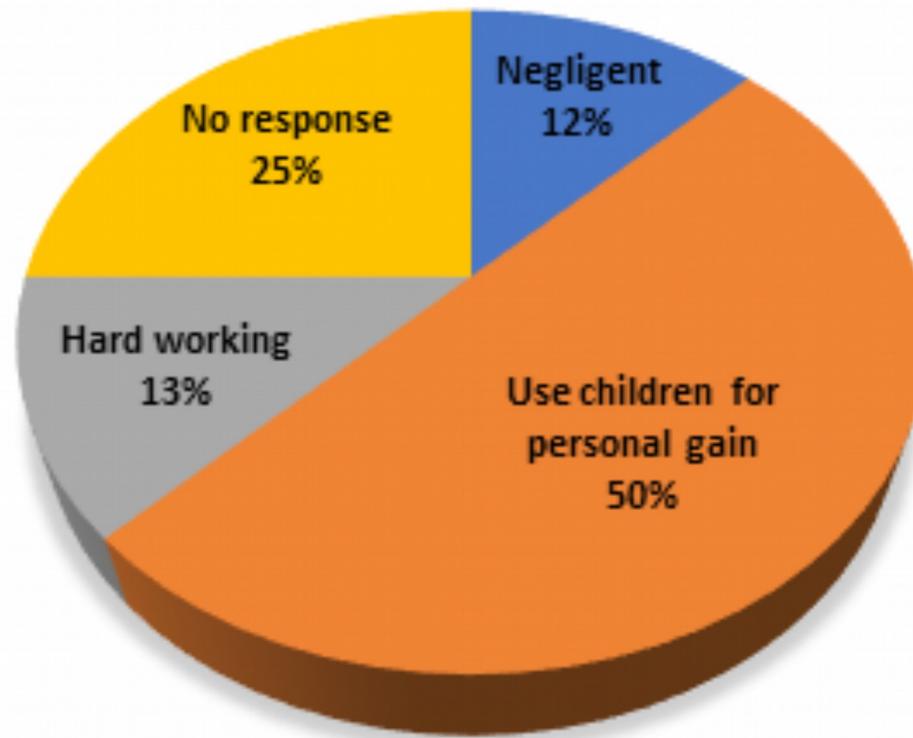
50% religious leaders perceived that parents were responsible in some way for their children with disabilities (25% Disease from parents and 25% Parent's neglect).

One of the quotation from the monk “In Buddhist's point of view, the children with disabilities due to the Karma from the previous life they must have done bad things. But in the reality, some children/adult with disabilities are caused by traffic accident. There are some disabilities due to the people stepped on the land mine, some parents did not take good care of themselves or some people has medical problems”.

One of Catholic leader in Siem Reap said that “I do not believe in Karma but the reason that the children became disabled due to the poverty, the difficult of life after the parents/grandparents had been through the civil war and the way of the parents think.

They do not have enough resources, plus their living environment is not hygiene and not enough nutrition to for their children to grow healthy. It is also the parents' genetic contributed to the children with disabilities”.

Community Religious Leaders' Perceptions of Parents with Children Having Disabilities



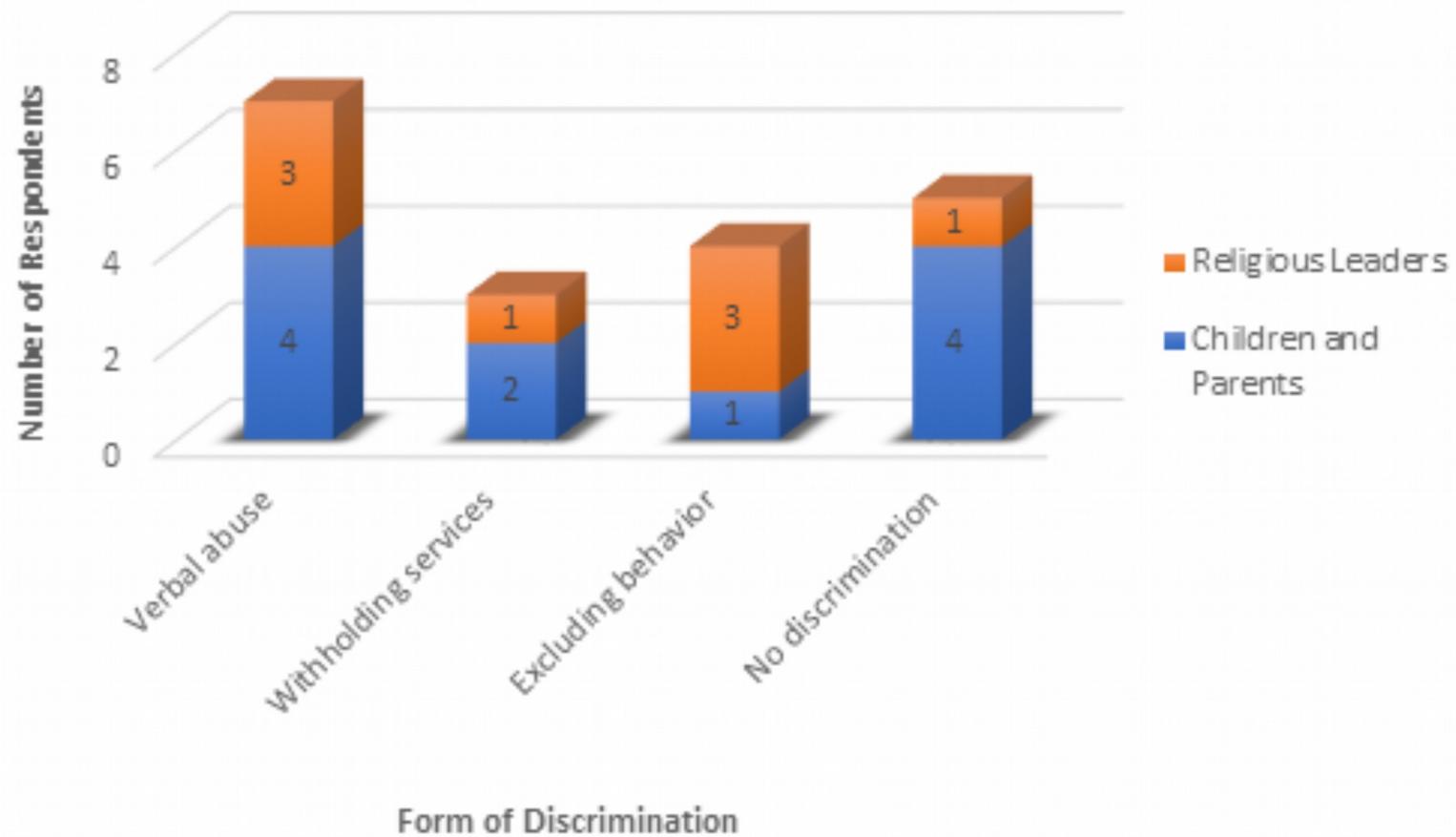
13% had a positive response towards parents of children with disabilities, they are hard working parents while other 62% of other religious leaders reflected on a negative response towards the parents of children with disabilities (Use children for personal gain 50% and Negligent 12%).

One of the church member/a volunteer of Free Tuktuk for People with Disabilities in Siem Reap said that “A lot of people pity on children with disabilities but people don't like the adult with disabilities (some beggars got the money to buy alcohol and use inappropriate language). “I have a real experience from driving the parents and children with disabilities, the father did not use the polite words but he treated me like a servant even though I am a volunteer who providing a free Tuktuk for children and people with disabilities”

- One of Catholic leader stated that “Some parents forced the child to beg for money and to buy the food. We noticed and seen that there are some of the children feel sad about this (beg for money from people).

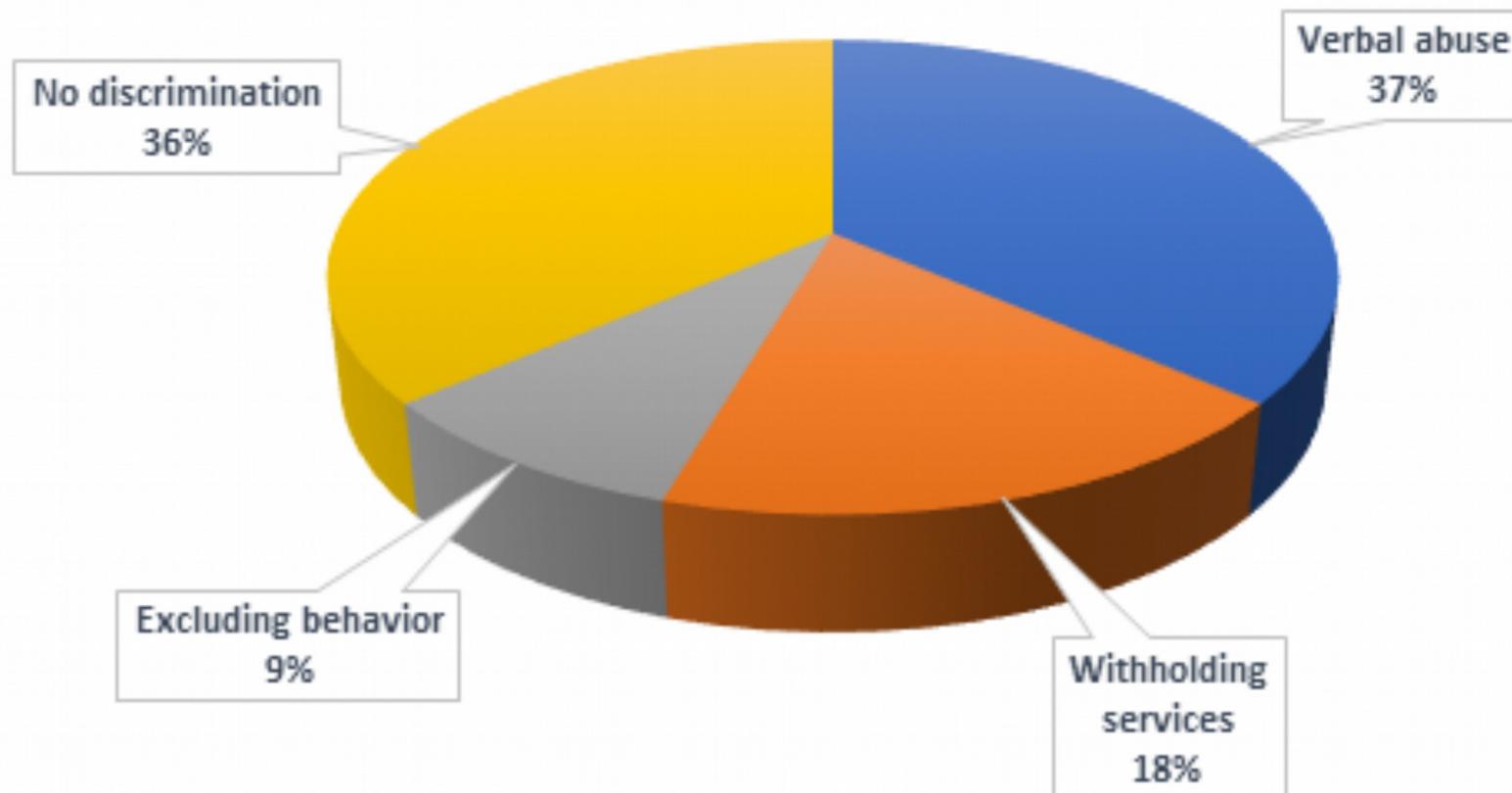
* One of the other church leader said that “I met a father of a child with disability, the father himself tired of taking care of his son with disability. Sometimes he discriminated against his own son (he eventually ignored the child's needs due to his tired of taking care of his own son). Some parents did not clean their child well, so it is caused other people don't want to go near the child. Some father smoke the cigarets near the child and when our church member who drives Tuktuk, told the father that smoking cigarets can be affected to his son's health so the father stopped smoking since then”.

Forms of Discrimination Observed Towards Children with Disabilities



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Forms of Discrimination Observed by Parents and Children Towards Children with Disabilities



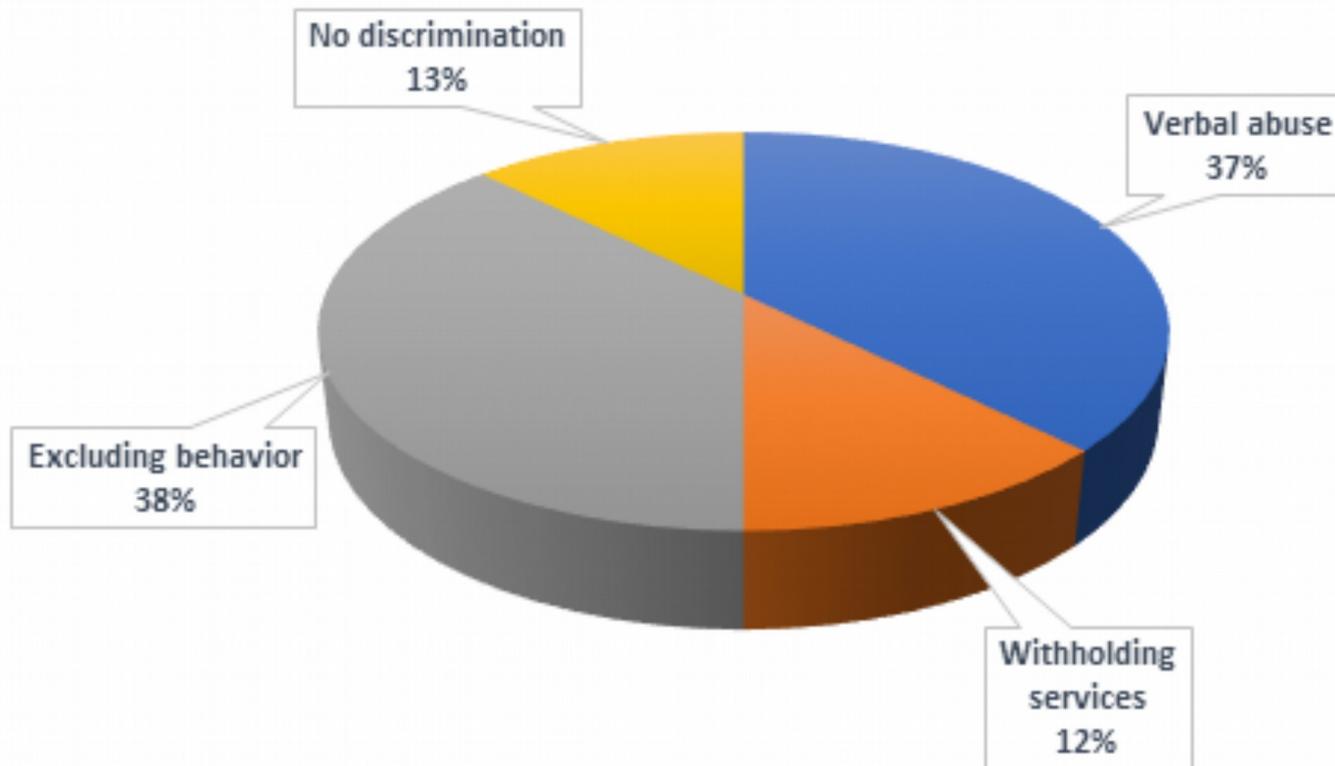
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One of the parent said that

“When I brought my daughter to Kuntha Bopha Children's Hospital, the doctor used inappropriate word: you don't know how to take care of your

Child?”. Since then I never bring her daughter back to KBH hospital, after that I brought my child to Angkor Hospital for Children (AHC) and they treat my daughter well”.

Forms of Discrimination Observed by Religious Leaders Towards Children with Disabilities

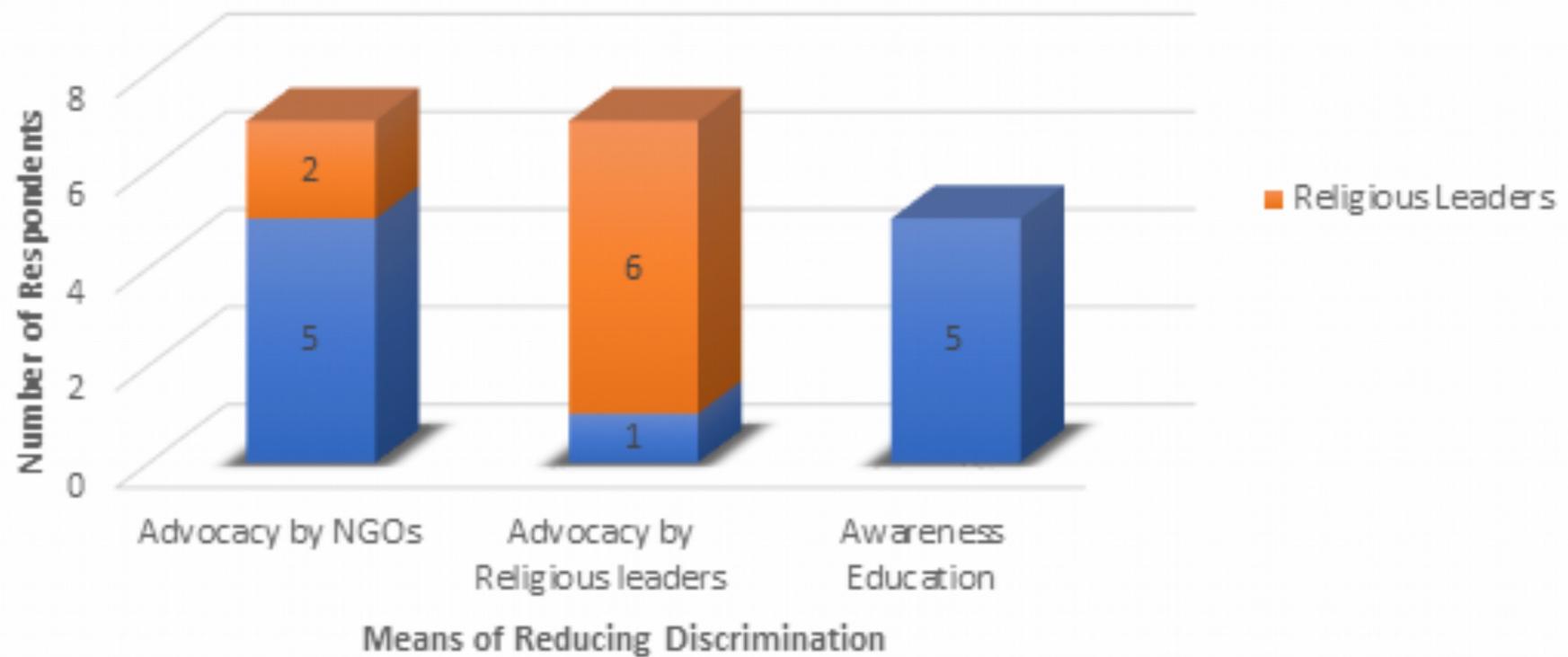


37% respondent from the religious leaders on “Verbal Abuse” which observed towards children with disabilities compare to 38% respondent toward “Excluding behavior”.

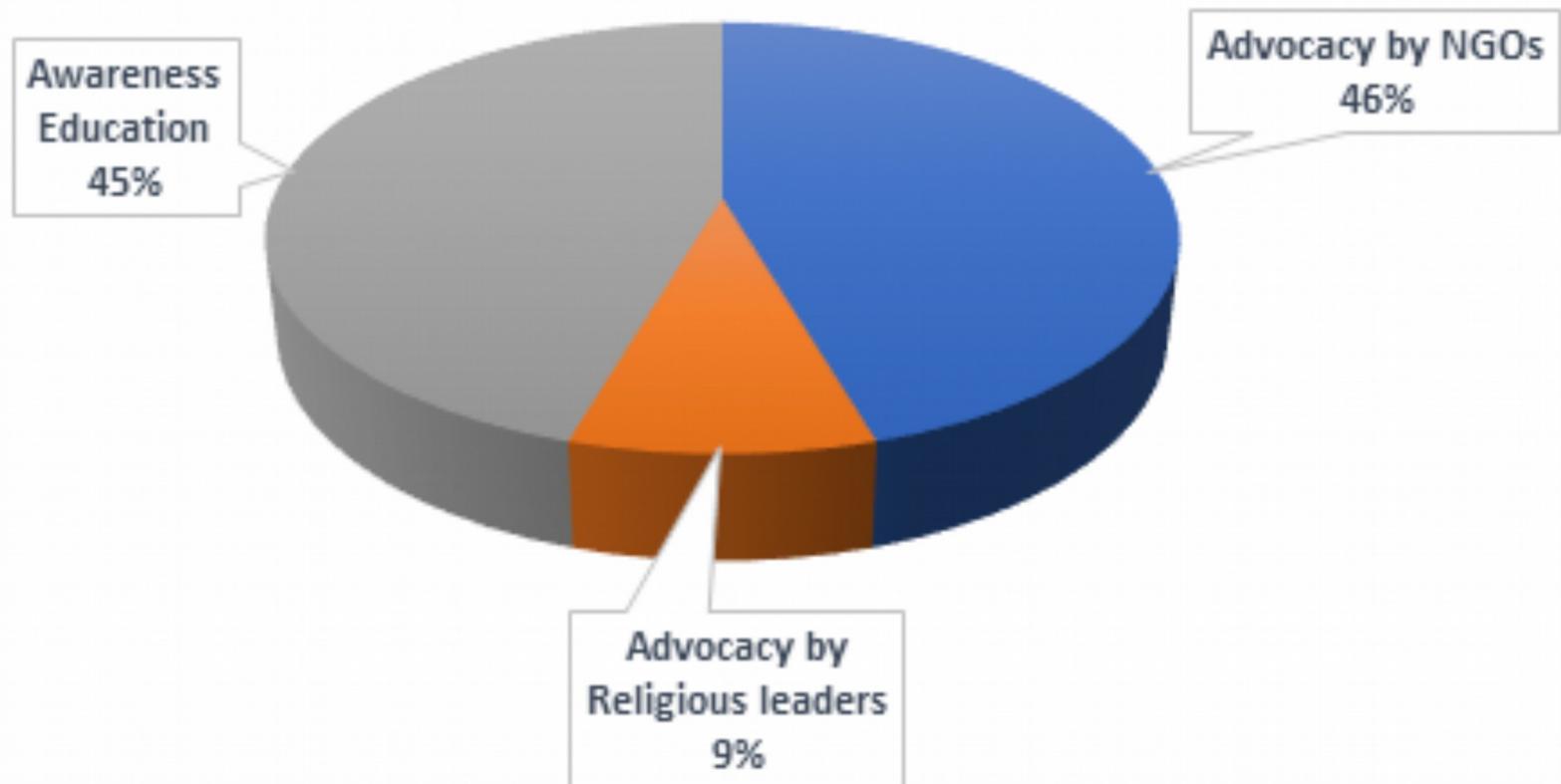
One monk stated “The people in the communities, they criticized the children/people with disabilities especially when the children beg people for money”.

The other monk at another temple said “In this neighborhood, some children did not play or talk to the children with disabilities as they they think the children with disabilities are not able to play or talk to them.”.

Means of Reducing Discrimination of Children with Disabilities

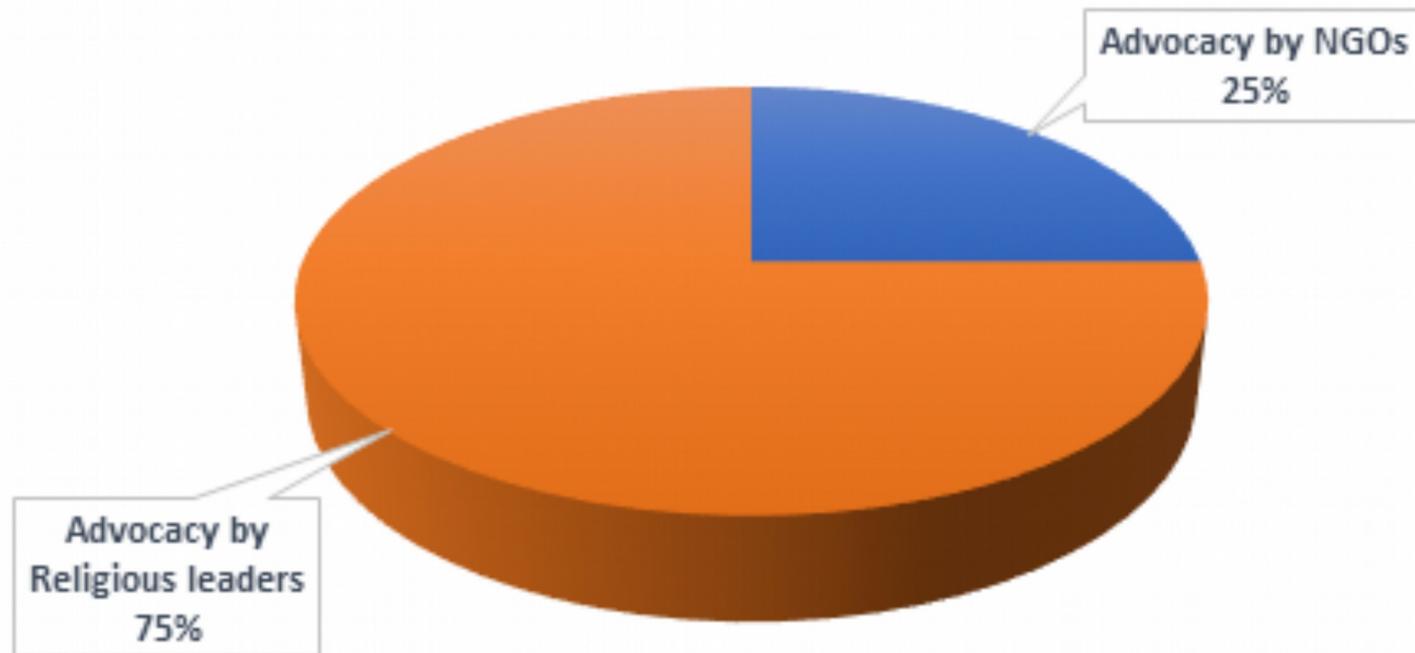


Means of Reducing Discrimination of Children with Disabilities as Perceived by Children and Their Parents



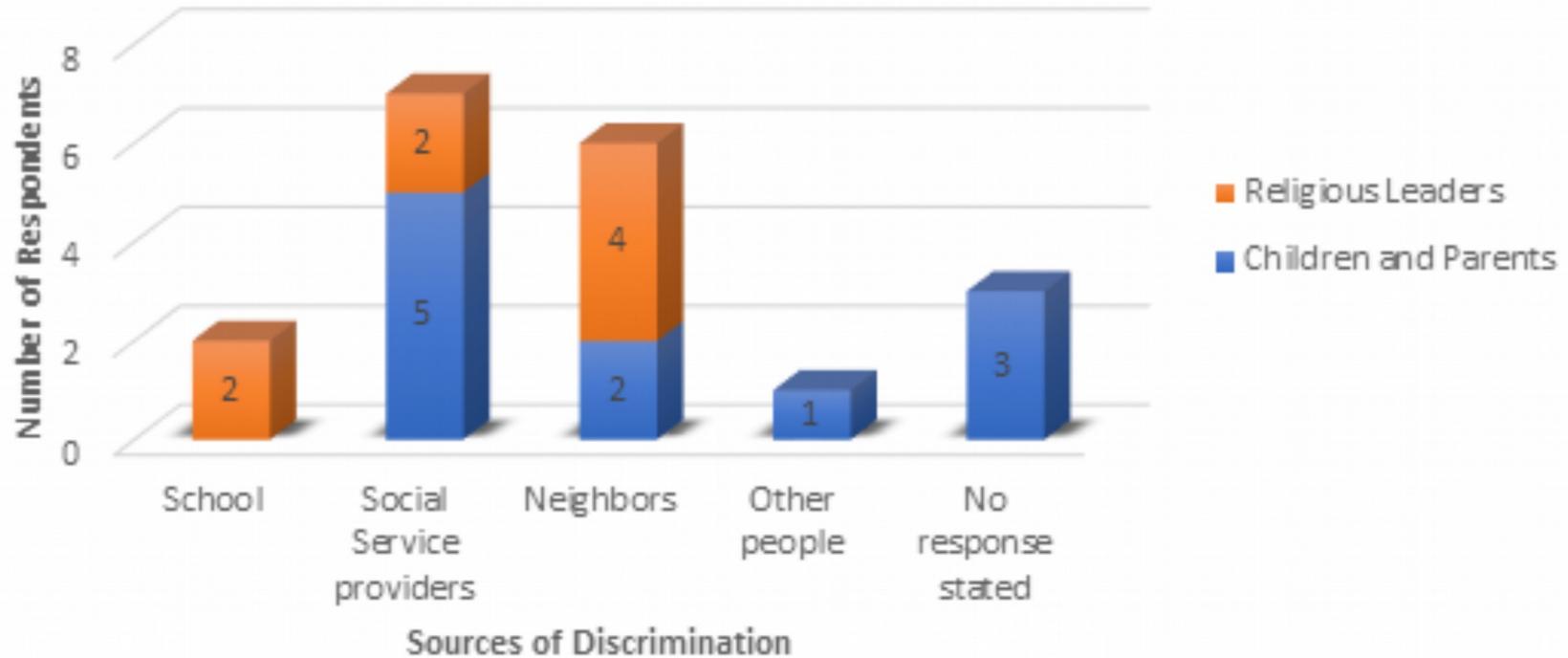
A mother of a child with disabilities “Safe Haven (SH) is using contract clinic at Angkor Hospital for Children. As I brought my child with disabilities to the dental clinic and accompanied by SH staff, the staff there treated my daughter as other children (all the children have to wait by the number but sometimes the staff called my daughter to go inside to see a dentist first).

Means of Reducing Discrimination of Children with Disabilities as Perceived by Religious Leaders



“At the Catholic school, the teachers did not discriminate against the children with disabilities. We trained the teachers to love all children and we are very careful to select the teachers to come and work here. There are some volunteers teachers came here to serve the children and they are happy to help the children with disabilities. We send the older children to Don Bosco school for vocational training skills and we also work with Krousa Thmey.”.

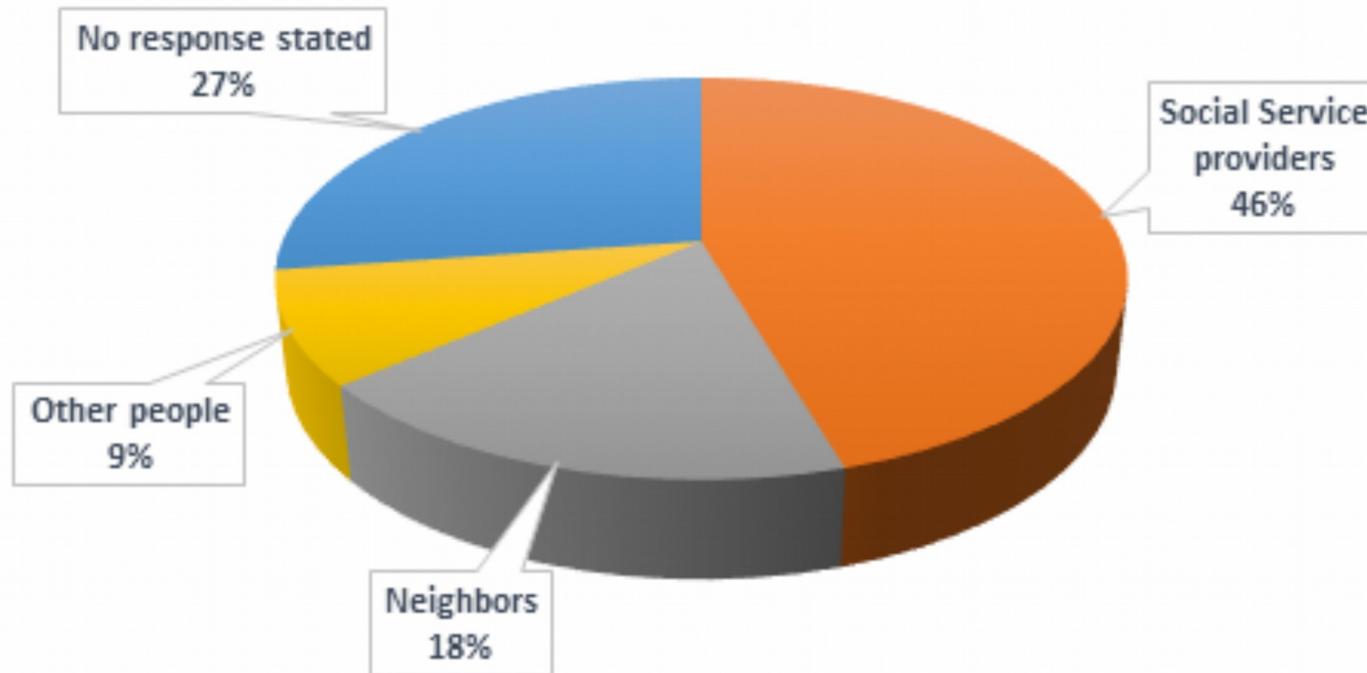
Sources of Discrimination for Children with Disabilities



5 out of 10 parents experience that their children being discriminated by the service providers (Doctors and Nurses) compare to 2 out of 8 religious leaders said that the children with disabilities experience the discrimination from the service providers.

2 out of 11 (Children and Parents) mentioned that they have been discriminate by the neighbor compare to 4 out of 8 religious leaders mentioned that the children with disabilities experience the discrimination by the neighbor

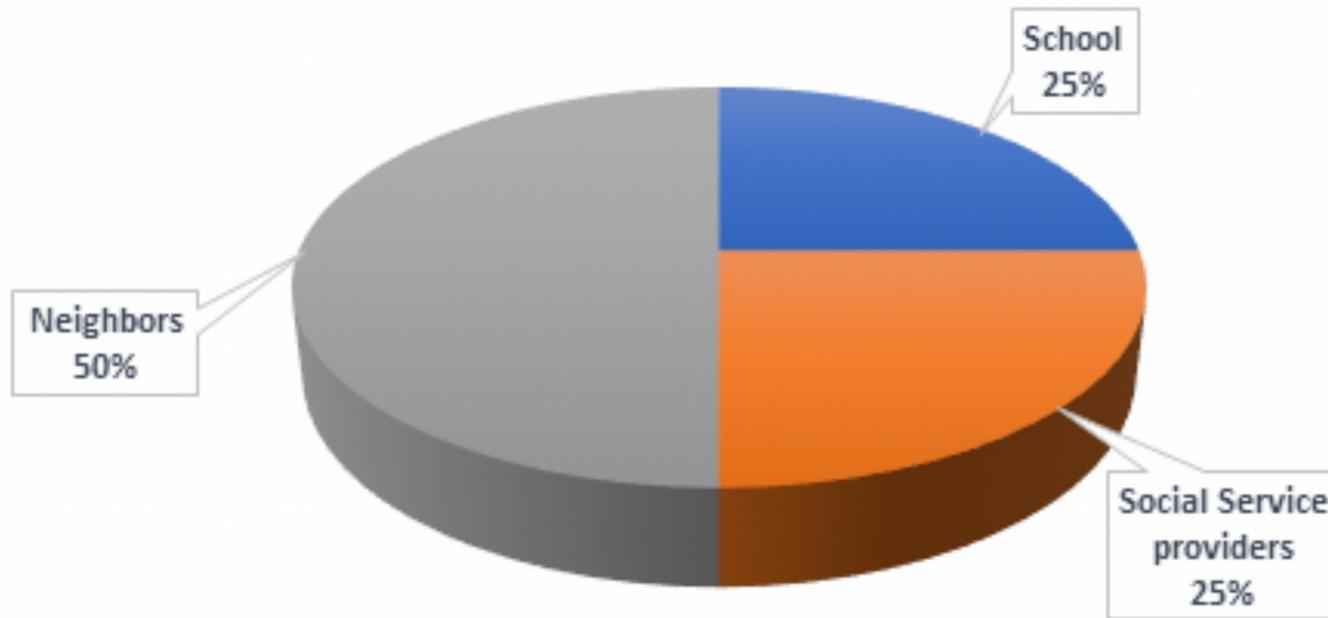
Sources of Discrimination for Children with Disabilities as Perceived by Children and Parents



46% respondents from Children and Parents who perceived and experienced of discrimination from the service providers (Medical doctors and Nurses) while 18% of the other respondent is the neighborhood which is the source of discrimination.

A mother of 3 years old girl said “When my daughter was 9 months old, I brought her to Kuntha Bopha Hospital (KBH) to get vaccination for Meningitis Vaccine but the doctor said that “Why do you bring your daughter to get vaccination as it is not benefit to your child as she is a disabled child”. The mother told this interviewer that “I feel very upset and bad feeling for my daughter after I heard the doctor said this word to my child”.

Sources of Discrimination for Children with Disabilities as Perceived by Religious Leaders



The religious leaders perceived that there are 50% of the respondent of the discrimination towards children with disabilities is from the Neighbors while other 25% respondent of the discrimination happened at school as well as another 25% of respondent of the discrimination sources is from the service providers at the Children's Hospital and Provincial Hospital.

*One of the monk said that “In the neighborhood, some of the children did not really play or talk to the children with disabilities. As my observation, there are 50% discrimination against the children with disabilities and other 50% is fine and play with the children with disabilities as normal”.

One of the other Church leader mentioned that “I feel sorry that some people have a negative point of view toward children/people with disabilities and they think that due to those children has karma from the previous lives so they discriminated against the children with disabilities”.

“We all should encourage, protect and help out the children with disabilities whatever we can. We should reflect on ourselves if we have our families/children with disabilities or similar problems, what should we do or how would we feel?”

F. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research highlights on the importance of the intervention from the religious leaders and NGOs who are making the difference and working together to end stigmatize and discrimination toward the children with disabilities.

Support awareness-raising activities are really important role of the communities leaders and religious leaders as they are part of the influences in the societies. There is likely to be a huge variation in social attitudes towards children with disabilities. In order to implement any policies or interventions there needs to be a huge change in mind-set before there will be any chance of equity and equality.

A sustained and targeted awareness campaign can increase understanding that education and access to healthcare is a basic human right, not only to encourage parents to send their children with disabilities to school and see the doctor or access to any other essential social services, but to make the wider community aware such children should attend school and able to access to quality of care, essential social services, and should be part of mainstream classes.

This is important to begin to break down the discrimination and division within society. Creating parent groups within schools, home, communities, child-to-child groups and activities and community groups will also make inclusion more likely to happen and to be sustained.

As I have been visiting the children with disabilities and their families in the villages as well as hospital visit, I can see their strength, resilience, perseverance and wants to see the positive changes into their children's lives especially to be able to received good quality health care, access to education and essential social services just as other children in the communities.

Moreover, from the observation and the interviewed of a child with disabilities and the parents, there are half of other people (50%) there are people have compassion heart and not discriminated against the children with disabilities. From the religious leaders' perspective, they want to contribute to the positive change in the communities as well as society in term of advocacy to improve the quality of care, social social serves without having any discrimination towards the children with disabilities and their families.