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EFFECTIVENESS OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING CONDUCTED FOR THE DISABLED PERSONNEL IN THE SRI LANKA ARMY



By

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ABSTRACT

In the history of wars, internal struggles and battles between nations, those Armies suffered casualties in different degrees and Kings, Queens and Warlords took keen interest in caring for these wounded and their families and they were afforded with special privileges as reciprocal measure during those times.

Being situated next to a regional giant, it had to face many foreign adversaries such as, Cholas, Maghas, Pandiyans, and Dravidayans, from India invaded and captured power in parts of Sri Lanka. Later, invasions by Dutch, Portuguese and English had much significance and reins of the union jack, prevailed in this country for a long period. Many wars had been fought against these invading armies and similarly large number of worriers and soldiers suffered casualties in those wars and the Kings took care of those wounded and their families.

After being granted sovereign status in 1948 from the British's, Sri Lanka had to witnessed many internal strife as mainly began in communal lines other than the two insurrections by the southern extremists. Then, the claim by the Tamil extremists in the North and East started a communal struggle of extreme nature claiming to calve out a separate state for themselves and, this, has now developed into a fully blossom war with international tangles which has lead to sap much resources of the country and destruction to lives and properties of its people.

In the wake of this continuous internal conflict, country is faced with many economic burdens and depletion of much needed resources. Also, this war has so far lead to loosing of lives over 60, 000 civilians and large number of civilians are displaced. And, due to this war, 13,973 soldiers have died 53,851 have suffered injuries. Out of the wounded, 8,309 were classified as permanently disabled and this situation has added a new dimension as caring, rehabilitation and re-employment of those injured have posed challenges to the Forces and the society.

It must be mentioned that soldiers casting aside their personal ambitions fight valiantly keeping away their personal ambitions to protect the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the country. In the prime of their lives, they suffer serious injury and disabled them from normal activities for rest of their lives creating an abrupt change in

life. This brings perpetual anxiety, frustration and loses of hope into their minds and a new approach with different mechanisms is needed to guide them to face the reality in relearning of new skills in order to be a productive and a contended citizens. In this endeavour, Government and the Army at large have taken some measures to assist those wounded to un-learn those skills already acquired and facilitated to re-learn new skills to face life in a new direction.

An empirical study in this important subject was embarked upon to evaluate the current measures taken by the Army and other related organizations to rehabilitate these disabled personnel in the Army. The disability in any form is a serious problem to any society and ours is no exception. Once, a soldier is injured in battle and then disabled, it is the prerogative of the Army and society to extend all the best possible support to regain his worth by facilitating him with necessary tools and skills to continue his life in normal condition. Going by the mechanisms available for the disabled to enhance his capability and capacity to be a useful member, it is seen that vocational training would be the “vehicle” to strengthen the individual in order to ensure fair deal for him while counselling is carried out “weed out” anxiety. This could arm him with required skills and abilities to meet the need to ensure either to continue productively in the Army or to change vocation to acquire a new job which would enable the disabled to be employed in an appropriate employment in order to “free” him being a burden to the immediate family and the society at large.

In this endeavour, this study is concentrated to evaluate the effectiveness of the current vocational training programs and systems available and to make suitable recommendations in this regard. It is also felt that vocational training alone would not fill the gap and therefore, other connected issues too needed immediate attention of the authorities to arrive at a feasible and practical solution to this important question thereby immediately bringing pragmatic solutions to negate the suffering and to alleviate the standard of living of them and their families.

Whilst this would “ease off” the current deficiencies prevailing in the minds of the disabled personnel, the solutions would enhance the much needed “will to fight” of the fighting soldiers as they see the practical solutions offered to fellow wounded comrades.

As discussed in this research, Community Based Rehabilitation is a major approach in rehabilitation followed by other Armies and societies as all disabled are living with diverse communities around them. The community is the “core” of this process and “inclusive communities” is the theme. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we too focus on this concept to ensure “better” tomorrow for those disabled soldiers. In this concept, the family, society and the country as a whole, have important roles to play in rehabilitation and ensuring contended military disabled community facilitating a much conducive atmosphere for all.

Thus, the researcher made a special emphasis of this important matter and approached it a positive perspective as neither the war has ended nor is cumulative effects on the disabled are not fully addressed by the authorities responsible in appreciating those who shed their blood for the betterment of the society and the country. It is further emphasized that a holistic approach to be the best as this is a larger social issue connected to other important issues since this has a greater impact on the social reintegration process.

1.1 The History of the Sri Lanka Army

A brief history of the Sri Lanka Army indicates that prior to the independence, Ceylon had two Regular and Volunteer units which were under the Royal Imperial Army. Later, with the attainment of the independence, Ceylon made arrangements to raise an indigenous Army, by basing the Royal units by renaming them as units of Ceylon

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