



Ministry of Planning
Development & Special
Initiatives



4TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Nurturing for Transforming Lives:
The Power of Early Childhood Development



Conference Report

22nd – 23rd February 2023

**Report
Prepared by** Ms. Sabha Munir, Manager Communications & Outreach
Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC)

Edited by Ms. Khadija Khan, CEO
Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC)

**Cover Design/
Layout** Zulfiqar Ali (Graphic Design Consultant)
BRAVO Designs & Concepts

Partners



Save the Children



World Health Organization



آغا خان یونیورسٹی
THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY



Sightsavers



SHIFA FOUNDATION
making an effort

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Opening Ceremony	3
Plenary I: Prioritising Investments in Early Childhood Development in a Changing World for Children: The Science and What Actions Work	11
Concurrent Sessions	22
Session I: Good Health	23
Session II: Adequate Nutrition	26
Session III: Responsive Caregiving	28
Session IV: Responsive Caregiving	34
Session V: Early Childhood Development in Emergencies	36
Session VI: Safety & Security	38
Workshops:	41
Workshop I: Early Childhood Development in Emergencies	
Workshop II: Early Childhood Development, Diversity & Inclusion in Early Years	

Panel Discussion I:	45
Role Of Distance And Non-Formal Education In Early Childhood Development	
Day II- Proceedings	
Plenary Session II:	48
Nurturing Care Framework - Plans, Advocacy, and Implementation in Pakistan- How this Compares with the Region, South Asia?	
Day II: Concurrent Sessions	60
Early Learning & Development Opportunities	
Poster Presentations	69
Workshop I:	73
Impact of Play-Based Learning on Child Development	
Panel Discussion I:	75
Role of AIOU in Early Childhood Development	
Closing Session	77
Annexures	81
Conference Recommendation	
Conference Core Committee	
Terms of Reference for the Conference Core Committee	

Executive Summary

The 4th International Conference on Early Childhood Development, with the theme **“Nurturing for Transforming Lives - The Power of Early Childhood Development,”** took place on February 22nd and 23rd, 2023, at the Allama Iqbal Open University in Islamabad. The conference was organised by a consortium of national stakeholders, including the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives (MoPD&SIs), Allama Iqbal Open University, UNICEF, Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC), and Rupani Foundation. Collaborating partners included Save the Children, Pakistan, World Health Organisation, Scaling Up Nutrition, the Aga Khan University, Sightsavers, and Shifa Foundation. The conference brought together over 350 participants from various sectors, including policymakers, legislators, ECD professionals, researchers, practitioners, civil society actors, UN agencies, donors, academicians, students, and parent representatives.

The conference theme, **“Nurturing for Transforming Lives: The Power of Early Childhood Development,”** highlighted the urgent need for nurturing environments for children and the available knowledge, resources, and political will to bring about positive change. The primary objective of the conference was to continue the tradition of organising ECD conferences and build upon the achievements of previous conferences in raising awareness, advocating for holistic ECD, fostering collaboration, and integrating ECD into national and provincial policies. The event provided an opportunity to share progress since the last conference and further strengthen partnerships among key stakeholders, including the government, UN agencies, the private sector, and academia.

The two-day conference featured an opening session, plenaries with 12 national and international speakers, concurrent sessions, workshops on important topics such as ECD in emergencies and inclusion in ECD, impact of play-based learning on ECD, panel discussions on distance and non-formal education in ECD and Role of Allama Iqbal Open University in promoting ECD, and a poster presentation. Additionally, an Early Childhood Development Expo showcased early learning products, educational materials, and franchise services from various partners, facilitating knowledge exchange and workforce development for ECD service providers.

The inaugural session was presided over by Prof. Dr. Mukhtaar Ahmed, Chairman of the Higher Education Commission, and included addresses by distinguished participants from various organisations such as by Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Vice Chancellor AIOU, Mr Nazir Ahmed, Chief Nutrition, SUN Focal Point, (MoPD&SIs), Mr. Abdullah Fadil, Country Representative UNICEF, Pakistan, Dr. Palitha Gunarathna Mahipala, the Country Representative and Head of Mission, World Health Organisation, Pakistan, Ms. Erinna Dia, Associate Director of Early Childhood Development at UNICEF Headquarters, New York, Dr Naeem Zafar, Chairman PAFEC Board, Mr. Muhammad Rafique Tahir, Sr Advisor, AIOU and Ms. Khadija Khan, CEO PAFEC.

The plenary sessions were led by Ms. Mehnaz Aziz, Convener of the Parliamentary Child Rights Caucus, and Dr. Baseer Achakzai, Director General Health at the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination Islamabad. The conference concluded with a closing ceremony featuring Mr. Aamir Ashraf Khawaja, Federal Secretary of Education and Professional Training, as the chief guest and Dr. Innousa Kabore, Deputy Country Representative UNICEF, as the guest of honor. The ceremony included reflections on the conference, findings, recommendations, and the way forward shared by key representatives.

Overall, the 4th International Conference on Early Childhood Development served as a platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and advocacy to promote the well-being and development of young children, emphasising the importance of nurturing care and the power of early childhood development in transforming lives.

4TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
Nurturing for Transforming Lives: The Power of Early Childhood Development



Opening Ceremony

The opening session of the Conference was presided over by Prof. Dr. Mukhtaar Ahmed Chairman of Higher Education Commission. The session was initiated with the recitation and translation of a verse from the Holy Quran, by Mr. Ibtisam Ur Rehman, AIOU. The formal session started with the welcome address by Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Vice Chancellor AIOU.



Conference Proceedings - Day I

Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Vice-Chancellor of the AIU welcomed the conference participants and speakers to the International Conference on ECD. He started off by thanking the conference organisers and key supporters, for their dedication and support to the cause.



Dr. Nasir started the address by highlighting that early childhood, especially from pre-birth to the age of four is a crucial period that shapes a child's development and well-being. It is during this time that physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development occurs at a remarkable pace, laying the foundation for future achievement. Unfortunately, this subject was only recently recognised in the country, with formal recognition starting about five to seven years ago, he said. It was only then that policymakers realised the

importance of providing support to children during these critical years for the betterment of their future. Shedding light on the purpose of the conference, Dr Nasir said that the conference will provide an important platform to the key stakeholders to discuss life-time opportunities for children to develop optimally that can be provided through various services and education programmes. It is widely known that the development in the early years of life provides the foundation for the years to follow, he said.

He further emphasised that after realising the importance of early childhood education and development, the government has introduced policies that focus on early years' education, healthcare, social development, and other aspects. Despite progress, the sector still faces many challenges, such as a lack of funding, trained personnel, and public awareness of the significance of early childhood education, he said. To address these challenges, Allama Iqbal Open University and its partners for the past many years have been working to improve early childhood education & development in Pakistan, he shared

He announced that to further improve early childhood development, a center of excellence for early childhood development has been established in partnership with Rupani Foundation, and Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood. The center will serve as a hub for the development of human and material

resources for the region and will function as a research and resource center for regional partners, not only in Pakistan but also for neighbouring countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

The inauguration of the center marks a positive development, which can help in the development of early childhood education and progress toward creating a better future for young children in the region.

Ms. Khadija Khan, CEO PAFEC shared the below background, objectives, and outcomes of the conference:



Background of the Conference

Sharing the background of the conference she said that the last three international conferences contributed significantly to increasing our understanding of ECD, through sharing knowledge and best practices and its mainstreaming in national policies and priorities.

Objectives of the Conference

Below she shared the objectives for the 4th International Conference on ECD:

- The strategic objective is to translate theory and policy into practice and applications, i.e. move from theory to practice, deliberate upon the impact of universalising integrated and multi-sectoral ECD in Pakistan
- Advocate for holistic, inclusive, and multi-sector ECD from pre-conception to 8 years in the country
- Update the stakeholders on the key steps taken such as the development of ECD Policy Framework & Standards and ECD workforce programme since the last conference in 2019
- Share research-based knowledge on how COVID-19, climate change, and the economic down-turn affected ECD sector in Pakistan, and solutions and plans to address the issues

- Share research-based knowledge on brain development, and the contributing factors such as mother & child health, early stimulation, adequate nutrition, safety, play-based learning and the role of positive and responsive parenting and other caregivers
- Share the status of Nurturing Care Framework implementation in the country and the bottlenecks which hamper the process

Expected Outcomes of the Conference

- A common understanding of the complete and important phase of ECD which is conception to age 8
- Commitment to implement the ECD Policy Framework through a multi-sector approach and advocate for legislation and curriculum from conception to 8
- Inter-agency/actions to expedite the promotion of holistic, inclusive, and multi-sector ECD services in Pakistan
- Partnerships created between the government and civil society organisations to empower communities and parents
- A coordination mechanism for public-private sector partnerships

Dr. Naeem Zafar, Chairman, PAFEC Board of Directors talked about the role of PAFEC to promote ECD in the country. The Alliance aims to provide holistic early childhood development services to every child in the country, starting from preconception to age 8, through an integrated, multi-sectoral and coordinated approach, he said. He highlighted that the Alliance's mission encompasses policy development, institution building, knowledge management, and ECD sector development, with a strong network to promote these goals.



Dr. Naeem pointed out the collaborative nature of the Alliance, working closely with relevant ministries, public and private universities, teacher training centers, colleges, and civil service organisations. Notably, the Alliance has a dedicated arm that focuses on parental education in collaboration with the Pakistan Paediatric Association and PAHCHAAN.

Highlighting the efforts made by the Alliance during the pandemic, he said that it adapted its approach by offering online and face-to-face certificate courses, ensuring that education and support continued despite the challenges. Dr. Naeem also mentioned that the Alliance has an extensive membership base, with over 200 institutional members and 900 individual members.

As a regular feature the Alliance is organising seminars, webinars, and conferences throughout its years of operation which serve as important avenues for knowledge sharing and capacity building in the field of early childhood development, he added.

Ms. Erinna Dia, the Associate Director of Early Childhood Development at UNICEF Headquarters, was the keynote speaker of the opening ceremony and talked about the main theme of the conference, **'Nurturing for Transforming Lives: The Power of Early Childhood Development'**



Ms. Erinna started her presentation by explaining that several sustainable development goals have contributed to poverty reduction, health, nutrition, women's and girls' equality, and violence prevention. Investment in quality affordable childcare, for example, is linked with greater opportunities for women's economic advancement and empowerment. She pointed out that children who receive early childhood development services, receive up to 25% more opportunities as adults compared to their peers who do not receive any such services. Therefore, early childhood development should not only be seen as a target in the SDGs but as a multi-carrier across all development goals.

Ms. Erinna highlighted the significance of the first 1,000 days of life, during which brain cells form new connections at an astonishing rate of 1 million per second. She emphasised that these connections play a crucial role in shaping children's cognitive function, learning abilities, and overall well-being, setting the stage for their future health and happiness. Ms. Erinna pointed out that from birth, a baby's brain is primed to receive stimulation and engaging experiences. It is within supportive and secure environments that neural connections are strengthened. However, she cautioned that these connections can be disrupted if a child is not adequately nourished, lacks proper stimulation, or is exposed to violence and pollution. Ms. Erinna underscored the immense importance of the child's environment during the early years, as it significantly impacts the development of these critical connections.

Moving forward, Ms. Erinna, emphasised that the wiring of the brain, which enables our senses, learning abilities, memory, emotional and behavioural development, relies on supportive environments rather than solely on genetic factors. She highlighted that advancements in neuroscience have shed light on the profound impact of positive and negative experiences on the brain, reshaping our understanding of child development. Ms. Erinna pointed out five key findings derived from scientific research.

First, she explained that child development is the result of the interplay between a child's genetic blueprint for brain development and the environment that shapes it. Second, she stressed the importance of early intervention, ideally starting during pregnancy, for optimal child development. The early stages, including pregnancy, are critical, as damage incurred during this period may have irreversible consequences. Third, Ms. Erinna distinguished between three types of stress: positive, tolerable, and toxic. While moderate and brief periods of stress can promote growth, toxic stress can have long-lasting negative effects. Without the presence of caring adults to buffer children, extreme stress caused by poverty, neglect, abuse, or maternal depression can compromise the developing brain's architecture, resulting in lasting impacts on learning, behaviour, and both physical and mental health. The fourth message she highlighted was the interconnected nature of the brain, with all areas working in harmony. Finally, Ms. Erinna underscored the importance of early stimulation and nourishment. Scientific evidence suggests that the maximum brain development

occurs when nutrition and stimulation are provided in tandem. Even before a child learns to speak, stimulation can occur through nurturing engagement from parents and caregivers, such as cuddling, eye contact, smiles, gestures, and enjoyable interactions. These experiences help young children comprehend the world around them, establish an understanding of people and relationships, and learn language skills.

Ms. Erinna highlighted the research conducted by James Heckman, which underscores the significance of early intervention. She emphasised that investing in quality early childhood development programmes for disadvantaged children is the most effective approach to reducing deficits. Such investment results in improved educational and health outcomes for individuals and yields social and economic benefits by boosting productivity and generating higher revenues overall. Ms. Erinna pointed out that spending on early childhood programmes targeting disadvantaged children, from birth to the age of five, can yield a remarkable return on investment of 13 to 16 percent per child per year. To maximise efficiency and effectiveness, efforts should prioritise the early years. Evidence strongly suggests that the highest rate of return in early childhood development is achieved by investing as early as possible, from birth to age five.

Ms. Erinna emphasised the critical importance of the early years, including pregnancy, in establishing the foundation for lifelong health, productivity, and overall well-being. She highlighted the concept of the Nurturing Care Framework, which identifies five interrelated and indivisible components essential for children to realise their full potential. These components encompass good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving, and opportunities for learning. Ms. Erinna further explained that these components are interconnected and must be provided simultaneously to foster holistic child development. As a result, she stressed the necessity of strong collaboration between different sectors and stakeholders to ensure that child development is achieved as an outcome for every child.

Ms. Erinna concluded her presentation by highlighting the eight key ingredients necessary for a robust Early Childhood Development (ECD) system. First, she emphasised the importance of an endorsed ECD policy and well-established implementation

structures. Second, she underscored the need for multisectoral collaboration, involving various sectors and stakeholders working together towards ECD goals. Third, Ms. Erinna emphasised the significance of investment and funding to support ECD initiatives effectively. She then pointed out the crucial role of integration and coordination, ensuring that different components of the ECD system work harmoniously. Furthermore, she highlighted the significance of legislation, standards, regulations, and agreements to establish a framework for quality improvement and resource development in the ECD sector. Ms. Erinna stressed the importance of accountability through ECD management information systems, which enable monitoring and evaluation of ECD programmes' effectiveness. She also emphasised the need for policy advocacy and effective social communications to create awareness and garner support for ECD initiatives. Finally, she stressed the principles of equity and rights, highlighting the necessity of ensuring that all children have equal access to high-quality ECD services, regardless of their background or circumstances.

By addressing these eight key ingredients, Ms. Erinna concluded that a strong and comprehensive ECD system can be established, promoting optimal child development and well-being.

Prof. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, HEC Chairman, addressed the audience as the chief guest for the inaugural session and highlighted several important points.

He began by emphasising the significance of early exposure for children's development, drawing attention to the practices in Israel where mothers receive diverse types of training during pregnancy, including exposure to subliminal messages like mathematical equations. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed questioned why such practices are not more widespread and why mothers in other parts of the world, such as Pakistan, often feel frustrated, especially during pregnancy. He pointed out that in Pakistan, natural factors leading to unhealthy and toxic stress and exposure to stressful media during pregnancy, contribute to mothers' frustration, negatively impacting a child's development with potential long-lasting consequences.

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed then stressed the crucial role of early childhood education and development, particularly in shaping organisational and human behaviour. He cited studies showing that the maximum learning occurs during the toddler age,

and the beliefs, habits, and knowledge acquired during this period persist throughout an individual's life.

The HEC Chairman highlighted the lack of focus on education in Pakistan, especially early childhood education. He noted that the education system has been siloed, with a sole emphasis on higher education, causing the country to lag behind. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed emphasised the need for a holistic approach to education, encompassing all levels from primary education to college-level education. He pointed to Sri Lanka as an example of a country that prioritised early childhood education, leading to positive impacts on their society. He stressed the importance of collaboration and analysis to identify missing elements in education, asserting that education is vital for developing well-rounded individuals capable of fulfilling various roles, including leaders, bureaucrats, professionals, or educators.

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed commended the efforts of the Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training, AIOU, PAFEC, and Rupani Foundation, along with international partners like UNICEF and WHO, for actively addressing the absence of Early Childhood Education/Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Pakistan. He viewed this as a positive step towards a futuristic approach to education and development. As a pioneer of ECD in the country, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed emphasised that PAFC is actively advocating for the attention that this important area deserves.

Lastly, he brought to light the plight of pregnant mothers who suffer from malnutrition and lack access to food due to the recent floods in certain areas of Pakistan. He said that this can significantly impact the health of both the mother and the baby, leading to various health complications and developmental issues. He called for key stakeholders to join hands in addressing these pressing concerns.

Mr. Abdullah Fazil, the Country Representative of UNICEF, Pakistan, delivered comprehensive remarks on UNICEF's agenda towards Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Pakistan.

He appreciated the commendable efforts of the conference organisers in successfully arranging the 4th International Conference on ECD, despite the significant challenges faced in the country. He said that the choice of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) as the venue added to the significance, as Allama Iqbal's concept of 'Khudi' resonates with

early childhood development, a man whose wisdom and thought are the genesis of Pakistan.

Mr. Abdullah highlighted that the notion of action be required rather than just theory is evident, as is the importance of indigenous ownership of what early childhood development should be. The idea that this is not about money but the practical implementation of what already exists is evident.



He further underscored the importance of multi-sectoral nature of early childhood development, encompassing areas such as health, nutrition, social welfare, protection, and education. While academic theories on ECD are essential, it is crucial not to overlook the innate human nature associated with it. Mr. Abdullah drew attention to the fact that childhood development is inherent to all living beings, including animals, involving elements of play, socialisation, and cognitive development.

Referring to the Chairman of the Higher Education Commission's remarks, Mr. Abdullah emphasised the significance of ECD for national development. He highlighted that countries are not run by robots but by humans, making today's and tomorrow's children the nation's most valuable assets.

Mr. Abdullah discussed the pressing challenges faced by Pakistan, including the staggering number of 23 million out-of-school children and high poverty rates, particularly in flood-affected deprived areas. Alarming stunting rates of 50%, prevalence of anemia among mothers, and early childbirth were also brought to attention. He stressed that a nation cannot thrive when such fundamental issues remain unaddressed. Poverty was identified as a critical factor, making a multi-sectoral approach to early childhood development is crucial.

Concluding his remarks, he expressed UNICEF's commitment to supporting the process and proposed the possibility of introducing a **certification programme for ECD. This would involve establishing a chair position and collaborating with other stakeholders to make ECD an integral part of technical and high-level education in the country, he said.** He anticipated that the next two days of the conference would focus on concrete actions to address these fundamental issues and move towards a brighter future for early childhood development in Pakistan.

Dr. Palitha Gunarathna Mahipala, the Country Representative and Head of Mission, World Health Organisation, Pakistan, highlighted the following aspects of ECD while speaking at the conference.



Dr. Palitha started his speech by thanking all the conference organisers for giving him the platform to highlight the significance of a critical agenda. Referencing to childhood development, Dr. Palitha emphasised the significance of the first three years of life, during which the human brain undergoes rapid growth. Research indicates that if children do not receive adequate stimulation during this crucial period, their development may be delayed, and in some cases, permanently affected.

He further highlighted that the early years offer a window of opportunity to establish a foundation for the development of language, social abilities, thinking, intellect, and physical skills. Evidence demonstrates that investing in human capital before the age of five yields significant returns, underscoring the importance of considering this fact in human capital development strategies.

Additionally, Dr. Palitha pointed out that malnutrition, poverty, neglect, and a lack of early learning

opportunities continue to impede the full developmental potential of one-third of children under the age of five, both globally and in Pakistan. Unfortunately, suboptimal brain development transmitted through generations perpetuates inequality, leading to lower educational achievements and reduced earnings in adult life.

He further stated that early childhood development (ECD) is a priority area for WHO, as it provides a window of opportunity to improve health and equity. In 2018, WHO and UNICEF launched the Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development at the World Health Assembly, supported by the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, the ECD Action Network, and many other global partners. In 2019, WHO published operational guidance on the Nurturing Care Framework, followed by global guidelines on improving early childhood development in 2020, and standards of ECD in 2021.

Dr. Palitha drew attention to the alarming rates of malnutrition in many parts of Pakistan, with more than 50% of children affected and high prevalence of stunting and wasting. These conditions not only hinder physical and mental growth but can also lead to health problems later in life. Thus, translating all this global guidance on early childhood development requires multi-sectoral collaboration and engagement from sectors such as health and education. The health sector plays a crucial role in building human capital, reducing inequities, and promoting sustainable development. It has the potential to reach many families and children during pregnancy, childbirth, and early childhood.

Acknowledging the commitment of the government to strengthening human capital through national policies and programmes, Dr. Palitha expressed the joint responsibility of today's leaders to ensure a sustainable and inclusive world for future generations, where everyone has equal access to development opportunities and can take full control over the decisions that shape their lives. WHO commits to supporting the agenda in collaboration with UNICEF, the Planning Commission, the Ministry of Education, and other ministries to drive progress forward.

Mr. Nasruddin Rupani, Chairman of Rupani Foundation, spoke about the Foundation's initiatives for Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Pakistan.

He expressed his gratitude to the conference organisers and partners for convening all the key stakeholders on a unified platform. He shared his

thoughts about the significance of Early Childhood Development (ECD), emphasising the involvement of parents, grandparents, and other significant individuals in a child's life, who can play their role in children's care and development during their early years. Mr. Rupani emphasised that creating a safe and secure environment is crucial for promoting healthy and balanced growth of children.

Furthermore, he highlighted the interconnectedness between a child's optimal brain development, and good health and well-being of the mother as it directly impacts the child's development. He specifically drew attention to the issue of postpartum depression (PPD), noting that it significantly affects many mothers after childbirth, leading to a decline in their own health and negatively influencing the child's development.

Discussing the initiatives of the Rupani Foundation's ECD programme, Mr. Rupani explained that the programme's key aspects are to engage mothers in activities that are part of parental education from the phase of conception until their child becomes three years old. The programme further brings together mothers and their children to the 'Informed Parenting' centres, where they spend a few hours each day, taking part in the activities around early childhood development, role of parents, parent-child relationship, nurturing care and the importance of mother's mental and physical health etc. This approach empowers mothers through equipping them with the required knowledge and skills to make informed decisions for their children and to serve as strong role models in society. He urged the government to learn more from this programme and take it to scale for laying a healthy foundation of the society in Pakistan.

Dr. Nazir Ahmed, Chief Nutrition and SUN Focal Person, Ministry of Planning, Development, & Special Initiatives, provided an update on the Ministry's efforts on Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Pakistan.

He underscored that a high-level task force on ECD was established in 2017, led by Minister Mr. Asan Iqbal, which led to the formation of the National Technical Working Group (NTWG). These initiatives aimed to prioritise and address the importance of ECD in the country.

Dr. Nazir Ahmed highlighted that the Ministry has developed the ECD Policy Framework for children aged Zero to eight, with technical and financial support from UNICEF. This framework provides comprehensive guidelines for the implementation of ECD programmes and initiatives across Pakistan. He emphasised that the outcomes and recommendations from this conference will strengthen the policy guidelines and will serve as valuable inputs in formulating ECD roadmap for ECD in Pakistan, which will be implemented with the support of various partners.

Recognising the significance of creating awareness about ECD at the grassroots level, Dr. Nazir Ahmed stressed the need to disseminate information and knowledge about ECD among the masses. This awareness-building effort will ensure that communities and families understand the importance of early childhood development and actively engage in nurturing the holistic growth of their children.

Additionally, Dr. Nazir Ahmed made an announcement regarding the Ministry's plan to establish a model early learning center/daycare facility at the Pakistan Planning and Management Institute. This initiative aims to provide a practical demonstration of best practices in early childhood development, serving as a model for replication in other regions and institutions. Concluding his remarks, he said that advancing ECD in Pakistan requires collaboration and coordination among key partners and stakeholders in the country.



PLENARY I:

Prioritising Investments in Early Childhood Development in a Changing World for Children: The Science and What Actions Work

Speakers

- Dr. Saba Shuja, Manager ECD, UNICEF Pakistan
 - Dr. Bernadette Daelmans, World Health Organisation, Geneva
 - Dr. Shazia Maqbool, Professor Developmental Pediatrics, University of Child Health Sciences, Lahore
 - Dr Salman Kirmani, MBBS, DABMGG, DABP Associate Professor & Chair, Division of Women & Child Health, The Aga Khan University
 - Dr. Naeem Zafar, Chairman,PAFEC Board and Founding Member of PAHCHAAN
-

Proceedings

The theme of 1st plenary was **“Prioritising Investments in Early Childhood Development in a Changing World for Children: The Science and What Actions Work”**. This theme emphasised the importance of investing in early childhood development and working together to improve early childhood development outcomes through strategic investments, policies, and programmes. Ms. Mehnaz Aziz, Convener of the Parliamentary Child Rights Caucus and Parliamentary Secretary for Law and Justice, National Assembly of Pakistan, served as the chair of the plenary. The session was moderated by Dr. Saba Shuja, ECD Manager, UNICEF, Pakistan.



Being the keynote speaker of the plenary session, **Dr. Saba Shuja** spoke on the main theme of the plenary; Prioritising Investments in Early Childhood Development in a Changing World for Children: The Science and What Actions Work.






resulting in an ordered progression of development, around physical, motor, cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional & self-regulation skills. This development is mainly taking place in the three main phases mentioned below:

She started her presentation by explaining that early childhood development is a maturational process

Dr. Saba further explained that early childhood development (ECD) refers to both an outcome and

What is Early Childhood Development?

Early Childhood Development is a **maturational process** resulting in an ordered progression of:

1 Physical	2 Motor	3 Cognitive	4 linguistic	5 Socio-emotional & self-regulation skills
				

Early childhood has **3 distinct phases**

Conception--birth	Birth-3 years 1000 days+	Pre-schools+ pre-primary (3-8 years)
--------------------------	-------------------------------------	---

a process. As an outcome, it involves ensuring that developing children are physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally sound, socially competent, and ready to reach their full potential. As a process, it encompasses intertwined interventions of health, nutrition, early stimulation, care, education, and child and social protection (welfare) services. ECD occurs because of the interaction between the environment and the child, and a healthy and stable environment helps brain development while caring for the child,

providing adequate nutrition and protection, and stimulating neural connections. The key aspect of the environment is ‘nurturing care’ received from parents or others.

She said early childhood development in enabling children to reach their maximum potential is critical. To support her argument, she highlighted the compelling evidence from neuroscience that shows how ECD plays a critical role in shaping brain development and

HOW: Multilevel Approaches	
Main Approaches	Illustrative Examples
 <p>Approach 1. Strengthening enabling environments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Package of family-friendly policies in place and parenting integrated into national health, nutrition, education, and social protection strategies ■ Cross-sectoral data dashboards on parenting developed with National Statistical Commission. ■ Evaluations of existing parenting interventions commissioned, and results utilized. ■ Legal codes banning violence and abuse and ensuring disaster safe and child friendly infrastructure
 <p>Approach 2. Supporting strengthened workforce capacities and integrated services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pre-service and in-service capacity building of Health, Education and Social Service workers explicitly includes content on gender-inclusive and disability-responsive parenting and caregiver mental health ■ School management committees include parents from pre-school through adolescence. ■ Parenting support is integrated in national service packages, implementation plans, and budgets.
 <p>Approach 3. Raising levels of awareness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Leverage tech-based platforms to share information, e.g., UNICEF Parenting hub, IOGT, Bebbo App, WhatsApp ■ Parenting support/information sharing integrated into ANC/PNC visits, parent-teacher meetings, etc. ■ Mass communication campaigns and community influencers/leaders engaged
 <p>Approach 4. Promoting gender norms and socialization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National parenting programmes include specific content developed with the ministry of Gender or women ■ Frontline worker training and parenting interventions incorporate resources, encouragement, and support for male caregivers (e.g., fathers-only group sessions) ■ Parenting programmes promote shared caregiving
 <p>Approach 5. Empowering parents and communities and encouraging participation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Mobilize community health workers and relevant community-based networks to empower caregivers and provide safe spaces for meaningful participation ■ Develop guidance on the parenting of adolescents from a wellbeing perspective (ADAP). ■ Provide tiered support to encourage participation of marginalized groups, e.g., parents with disabilities

function. In addition, she mentioned the economic evidence that supports ECD as a wise investment, as early childhood programmes yield over a 13% return in reducing poverty and income gaps, as well as improving economic competitiveness.

Dr. Saba further noted that the prenatal period and the first few years after birth play a critical role in the development of core immune functions, metabolic regulation, and other physiological systems that can affect long-term well-being. During the first few years of life, a child's brain develops rapidly, with more than one million neural connections formed each second, which serve as the building blocks for their future. She emphasised that responsive interactions with adults are crucial to building a child's brain, as these relationships not only promote healthy brain development but also protect children from exposure to prolonged stress and the negative impacts of toxic stress on early brain development.

Dr. Saba highlighted and emphasised the following five main messages: (1) the relationship between genes and environment is closer than ever before; (2) timing matters, and early intervention is the answer; (3) toxic stress during early childhood has lifelong impacts; (4) brain complexity is not homogenous but interconnected, so we need to work together; and (5) nourishing the mind means providing nutrition and stimulation. To promote children's optimal development, interventions that support nurturing care are critical. Programmes that provide early nutrition, stimulation, and protection in the first 1000 days of life can improve individual adult earnings by almost 25%. Investing in early childhood development benefits children and in turn nations – supporting a more skilled, educated, and healthy workforce.

Dr. Saba further identified four categories of interventions for optimum development of children: health and nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving and early learning. She further provided examples of interventions such as maternal nutrition, antenatal care, childbirth care, essential newborn care, breastfeeding, complementary feeding, immunization, management of childhood illness, care for maternal mental health, care for children with developmental difficulties, prevention of substance abuse, birth registration, safe water and sanitation, good hygiene, clean environments, clean air, safe places for recreation, prevention of violence, and cash transfers.

Dr. Saba concluded her presentation by outlining five strategic actions to strengthen ECD: lead and invest, focus on families and their communities, strengthen services, monitor progress, scale up and innovate, and the below five multi-level approaches to promote and strengthen ECD in the country:

Dr. Bernadette Daelmans: World Health Organisation in Geneva and the Eastern Mediterranean Region gave a virtual presentation and discussed the implications of emergencies on children's healthy growth and development.

She posed the following three questions for consideration:

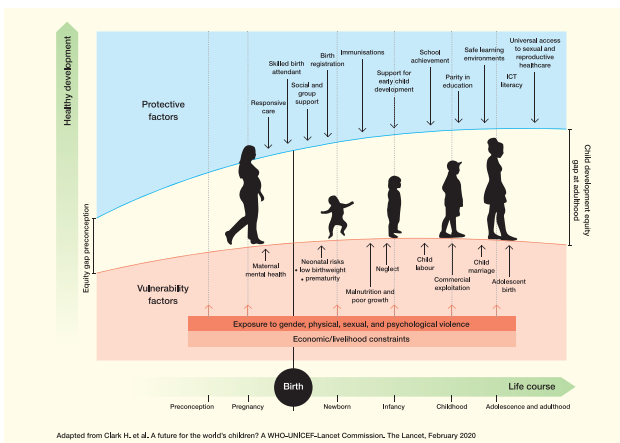
- What are the implications of emergencies for children's healthy growth and development?
- How do we ensure that children receive nurturing care, even during an emergency?
- And what resources exist to help those working in the health sector and beyond?

Dr. Bernadette started her presentation by bringing up the importance of nurturing care for children. She said that to reach their full potential, children need the five interrelated and indivisible components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, opportunities for early learning and responsive caregiving. To further elaborate these, Dr Bernadette mentioned that it is crucial to keep them safe, healthy, and well-nourished, as well as respond to their needs and interests, and encourage them to explore their environment and interact with caregivers and others. Nurturing care not only promotes children's development but also protects them from the worst effects of adversity by lowering stress levels and encouraging emotional and cognitive coping mechanisms.

Talking about the role of parents and caregivers during emergencies she said that it is vital to support parents, intimate family members, and caregivers to care for themselves and provide nurturing care for their young children. With that being mentioned, Dr. Bernadette then discussed the risks for young children during crises; she pointed out that while all children in resource-poor settings face significant obstacles in achieving their developmental potential, young children in humanitarian settings are particularly susceptible to physical, developmental, mental, and emotional threats. Dr. Bernadette further explained that the compounded risks to young children's development are linked to a range of experiences,

such as forced displacement, migration, and resettlement to a new setting like a refugee camp or integration within host communities. Due to these experiences, mothers, fathers, infants, and young children in crisis contexts are likely to have limited access to preventative and curative health services, face a high risk of malnutrition, experience elevated levels of insecurity, violence, and stress, and other potential effects arising from socioeconomic adversity or extreme poverty.

Dr. Bernadette further emphasised that young children living in crisis contexts are exposed to prolonged and excessive stress activation, such as toxic stress, that can alter their brain and body chemistry, leading to detrimental and lifelong negative implications as shown in the image below.



Expanding on the image presented earlier, Dr. Bernadette explained that research has shown that access to nurturing care can mitigate the threats mentioned above. For infants and young children, a healthy and supportive relationship with a caregiver is crucial to building resilience. However, refugee families and families in emergencies face several obstacles in meeting their children's needs. When caregivers are grappling with loss, insecurity, depression, and adversity, their ability to positively engage with their children is hindered. This creates an equity gap that emerges in early childhood and only widens into adulthood. In emergency situations, the goal is to ensure that protective factors are in place and that caregivers can provide care for their young children.

She then asked how we can ensure that children receive nurturing care even in times of emergency. The brief titled “Nurturing Care for Children Living in Humanitarian Settings” highlights the actions that countries must take to strengthen nurturing care and reduce the impact of emergencies on the lives

of young children and their families, she added. The brief calls upon all relevant stakeholders to invest in evidence-based policies and interventions that have been shown to build resilience and mitigate the harmful effects of emergencies.

Dr. Bernadette outlined and suggested the below actions to ensure children's well-being in humanitarian settings:

REMEMBER: She urged organisations to sustain actions that contribute to nurturing care that are relevant to the specific setting and phase of the emergency. Establishing safe play and learning spaces for young children and their caregivers was highlighted as a crucial step towards promoting nurturing care in these settings.

STRENGTHEN: She emphasised the need to conduct rapid response assessments to identify the needs of pregnant women, young children, and their caregivers. Additionally, she suggested updating existing policies and plans to ensure that continued attention and financing for nurturing care is prioritised.

ADD: She emphasised on bolstering staff capacity to support nurturing care for early childhood development, as this can have a significant impact on the well-being of young children in humanitarian settings. Finally, she highlighted the importance of protecting caregivers' mental health and providing psychosocial support to help them cope with the often-challenging circumstances they face in these settings. However, she further asked rhetorically how might we support the capacity of the frontline workers to promote caregiver-child interactions that are playful, that are nurturing, and that are responsive.

In response to her question above, Dr. Bernadette highlighted that the brief from Moving Minds Alliance outlines the below seven actions that need to be taken to not only respond to an emergency but also to prepare health workers for the emergency:

1. Establishing family-centered early childhood programmes for all young children and families affected by crisis and displacement
2. Increasing funding and explicit targeting of inter-sectoral early childhood programmes and services in humanitarian, fragile, and conflict settings, as well as in host communities, resettlement, and return contexts

3. Establishing and strengthening inter-sectoral and inter-agency coordination mechanisms specifically for early childhood development (ECD) in crisis response efforts
4. Integrating early childhood interventions into existing services and delivery platforms that already reach infants, toddlers, caregivers, and pregnant women
5. Providing ongoing mental health and psychosocial support, along with parenting assistance, to displaced caregivers raising young children.
6. Engaging refugee families and children as active partners in programme design and delivery including identifying needs, implementing interventions, monitoring progress, and evaluating the impact of initiatives
7. Promoting ongoing research to better inform early childhood practices for children and families affected by displacement. Additionally, there should be a focus on collecting age-disaggregated data to assess child development and the quality of implemented ECD services. Normalising this data collection was deemed important.

She further highlighted that the World Health Organisation has introduced an implementation framework specifically designed to improve the health and development of newborns, children, and adolescents in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Among the three strategic areas of the framework, Dr. Bernadette specifically drew attention to the second strategic area, which focuses on humanitarian emergencies.



Within this strategic area, she pointed out several actions. These actions include ensuring proper representation of newborn, child, and adolescent health in the emergency coordination mechanisms, obtaining and reviewing data to effectively prioritise actions, incorporating specific when measuring the

impact of the emergency response, strengthening the capacity of national authorities and local communities in managing newborn, child, and adolescent health during emergencies.

She added that WHO has developed two guides to implement this framework and one of them is particularly focusing on newborns, while the other focuses on children and adolescents. The field guide for newborn health works in conjunction with the 2018 Interagency Field Manual on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings (IAFM), which provides guidance on building comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including maternal and newborn health, she said. The specific aim of the newborn health guide is to address the unique challenges faced during the 28-day neonatal period following birth in humanitarian crisis situations. Its purpose is to reduce neonatal morbidity and mortality by offering recommendations on critical life-saving activities that can be implemented relatively quickly, even without advanced newborn care training. Talking about the scope of the guide, she said that it offers guidance to programme managers on initiating newborn health services during the acute phase of a crisis and provides strategies on how to enhance and expand these services over time, based on the context of the setting.

The second guide, which is 'The Operational Guide for Child and Adolescent Health', serves as a companion to existing guides on newborn and sexual and reproductive health in humanitarian emergencies, she added. Sharing the development process of this guide, she said that it was informed by a rapid review that aimed to identify gaps in current approaches to child and adolescent health during humanitarian emergencies. The review she said highlighted two key points; firstly, the importance of recognising the diversity of emergencies, including their duration and phases with the involvement of various actors who may be undertaking similar or different activities and the ever-changing political environment across different emergencies. Secondly, the availability of the existing resources and their under-utilisation because of limited accessibility, lack of dissemination to users, contextual inappropriateness, or complexity. Based on these findings, she said the rapid review recommended to make the 'Operational Guide' more relevant and useful for both health and non-health actors and should aim at consolidating existing information rather than generating new resources that duplicate or compete with existing ones.

Therefore, Dr. Bernadette said that the Operational Guide serves as a synthesis of existing guidance, incorporating existing standards, guidance, and documents. It presents a simplified, systematic approach and provides links to tools and resources to support actions facilitating the coordination and utilisation of existing resources. The Operational Guide revolves around the following four key programmatic actions; **coordinate, assess and prioritize, respond, and monitor, evaluate, and review** which form a continuous cycle of activities, she said.

Moving on with her presentation, Dr. Bernadette highlighted the need for urgent actions during times of crisis, emphasising the importance of considering how these actions directly or indirectly influence caregivers' behaviours and decisions. These influences can occur through policies, services, or within the surrounding communities. To address this, she stressed the significance of adopting a holistic approach that considers the broader range of needs caregivers may have, including financial assistance, stability, social protection measures, and maintaining integrated child and family services, including essential health services.

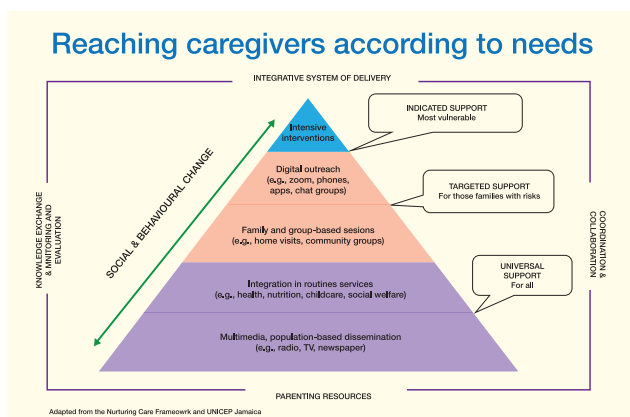
Other key important areas she highlighted included supporting caregiver mental health through social support systems and stress-reducing activities and the need to promote positive caregiver-child interactions and encourage playful parenting approaches. She acknowledged that during emergencies, parents' ability to provide nurturing care is significantly compromised, as evidenced by the immense strain and pressure experienced by caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic. She emphasised the urgent need to provide support to parents in emergency situations, particularly for families facing financial or social challenges. However, she noted that all parents, to varying degrees, benefit from support during emergencies,

with some requiring comprehensive assistance to cope effectively. She presented three levels of support for parents based on different levels of need, as depicted in a pyramid model.

At the top of the pyramid, she highlighted the need for intensive interactions, combining in-person and possibly digital outreach, for families who require extensive support. The next level consists of targeted support for families at risk of facing greater challenges. This level may involve family and group-based sessions, such as home visits or community groups, supplemented by digital outreach platforms like Zoom, phones, apps, or chat groups. The third level of support is universal support, which Dr. Bernadette emphasised is essential for all parents. This support can be integrated into routine services such as health, nutrition, childcare, and social welfare. It can also be disseminated through multimedia platforms like radio, TV, and newspapers.

Dr. Bernadette concluded her presentation by underscoring the importance of conducting rapid assessments to understand the specific support needed by parents and how best to provide it. She briefly mentioned four resources that offer guidelines and practical recommendations to enhance universal support for parents, particularly in health and nutrition services, which can be adapted to various contexts. She emphasised that these recommendations are applicable to parents worldwide and become even more critical during emergencies. Dr. Bernadette encouraged the audience to visit the Nurturing Care website for further information.

Dr. Salman Kirmani, MBBS, DABMGG, DABP Associate Professor & Chair, Division of Women & Child Health, The Aga Khan University, spoke on the flood support and relief that Aga Khan University (AKU) was part of during the emergency caused by the floods.



He began his talk by thanking the organisers and acknowledging the collective learning that would take place during the two-day conference. Dr. Salman talked about the challenges AKU faced during the floods and admitted that providing Early Childhood Development (ECD) and care services during the emergency was the most challenging task. He said that the AKU's Vice Chancellor made it clear that whatever action AKU takes even in the face of emergency must be socially relevant, and ECD is one of the most socially relevant investments in time and effort for the university.

Discussing the details of the recent floods, he said that the floods have had devastating impacts, affecting at least 33 million people, including 16 million children and 650,000 pregnant women. Over 1.74 million houses and nearly 23,000 schools were damaged, and millions of families and children were displaced. The floods have claimed the lives of 1,739 people, including 499 children. The flooding caused \$14.9 billion in damages and \$15.2 billion in economic losses. Furthermore, the food security situation is deteriorating, with 9.4 million acres of harvest and 1.2 million livestock destroyed.

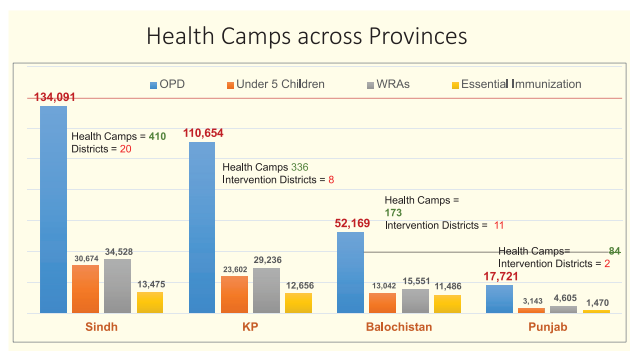
Dr. Salman said that the worst hit were the mothers and children as the impact on them was alarming. Pregnant and lactating women suffered a lot, and a lot of interventions were targeted towards them. There were about 1.6 million children with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) across all the flood-affected districts, and 1.2 million pregnant and lactating women in need of Targeted Supplementary Feeding (TSF). Poor sanitation and contaminated water resources were causing disease outbreaks, adversely affecting the health and well-being of children, causing diarrhea and other water-borne diseases. There was also a high risk of measles and rubella, along with water-borne, skin, and acute respiratory illnesses. Routine immunisations were interrupted, particularly in Sindh and Baluchistan. The effects on children's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development are unimaginable and yet to be measured. When the floods hit Pakistan, the whole nation responded, but keeping an eye on one emergency while another one rears its ugly head was the biggest challenge, he added.

Talking about the critical importance of early childhood development (ECD) in emergency situations, he said that since we all know that the first five years of life are a unique window of opportunity, during which 90% of brain

development occurs, and if children at this phase lack nurturing care may experience stunted growth and fewer neural connections. This emergency is posing the same threat to the children who are in flood-hit areas. The effects on them can significantly impair their ability to cope with the accumulating stress, leading to toxic stress. Toxic stress, he said, can have immediate and long-lasting detrimental effects on children's growth and development. He further explained that adverse experiences during early years are associated with an increased risk of impaired behaviour, learning difficulties, and compromised physical and mental health in the long term. Despite growing recognition of the significance of ECD, he said there is still a critical gap in Disaster and Risk Reduction (DRR) responses concerning the mitigation of negative consequences on young children's overall development in emergency settings.

Therefore, he recommended to integrate ECD programmes in other ongoing programmes such as health, nutrition, education, WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), and child protection during emergencies, following overarching principles of Child Rights, Equity, and Inclusion.

Dr. Salman Kirmani then shared some pictures of the devastation caused by the floods, and he talked about how AKU responded to the crisis. They were able to touch just a few districts, but people responded by providing aid as much as possible, whether it was through ground transport, personal transport, or animal transport. The below chart shows the progress made by AKU under different interventions made in the affected provinces:



Moving ahead, he recommended that identifying and assessing the status of ECD in DRR policies at the federal and provincial levels is essential. ECD needs to be accounted for in policies and programmes of DRR and for that necessary policy advocacy, capacity building, and awareness raising at the governmental,

regional, sub-regional, national, and local levels is necessary, he said. Clear roles and responsibilities for government and non-government stakeholders in delivering ECD services during emergencies should be established and documenting and sharing best practices for ECD DRR based on experiences from the field, he added.

Furthermore, Dr. Salman underscored the need for incorporating ECD into training, simulations, and planning exercises conducted by humanitarian organisations in the field. He highlighted that evaluating and analysing the effectiveness of ECD emergency operations and their impact should be an integral part of these efforts. By conducting thorough evaluations, organisations can identify strengths and areas for improvement in their ECD interventions during emergencies.

Dr. Naeem Zafar, the Founding President of PAHCHAAN, spoke on the role of parenting to raise children. The title of his presentation was, ‘**It takes a village to raise a child: Key Challenges in Parenting and its Way Forward.**’



He highlighted various cases and challenges related to parenting by sharing examples, such as Samina struggling with breastfeeding, Tahira frequently yelling and beating her son, and Sara allowing her child to watch too much screen time. He asked some key questions from the participants related to these cases, to identify factors that may be influencing their behaviour. To make the participants more aware about parenting is, Dr. Naeem Zafar shared the definition of parenting as “interactions, behaviours, emotions, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and practices associated with the provision of nurturing care” (UNICEF, 2017), and the challenges faced by parents in providing nurturing care. He also identified challenges related to peer/family and child.

He emphasised that parents face several key challenges, including a lack of confidence, feeling overwhelmed by stress, having idealistic and high expectations, struggling with work and family balance, and having a judgmental attitude, challenges related to peer/family pressure, cultural traditions and myths, and an overload of information from social media. Additionally, challenges related to the child may include disabilities, chronic illnesses, alternative care, neglected and abused children, and street children. To overcome these challenges, he suggested using the 5C’s; care, communication, consistency, choices, and consequences which can ensure nurturing care for all children.

Dr. Shazia Maqbool, Professor Developmental Pediatrics, University of Child Health Sciences, Lahore spoke on **Early Child Development, Identification of Developmental Delays & Intervention.**

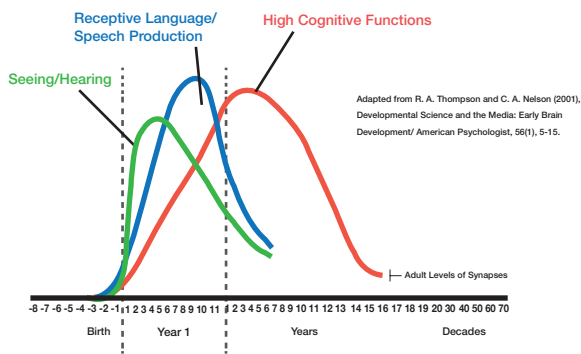


Dr. Shazia started her presentation by stressing on how early child development is a silent pandemic and child development in general can be negatively impacted by disasters such as floods and earthquakes, as well as man-made disasters like wars and being orphaned. Children affected by these events can experience developmental delays and emotional trauma. It is important for us as human beings to take responsibility and work towards preventing these disasters from occurring. Early identification of developmental delays is crucial, and we should invest in early intervention to address them. She further described that early child development refers to the many skills and milestones that children should be achieving but they do not achieve because of ECD not being a priority. The term “early childcare and development” (ECCD) was coined to emphasise the importance of involving everyone in a child’s life, including family, friends, and the community. She further added that it was

back in 1970s when people started talking about the delay in child development and that's when different domains of development were brought up, including motor, visual, cognitive, and speech development, which are all interlinked. ECD encompasses a range of skills and milestones that children should achieve by the time they reach the age of five. Early child development is influenced by various factors, such as medical, genetic, environmental factors, and characteristics of the child and family, she said.

Presenting the below image, she explained brain development which starts much before the baby is born. She said that synaptogenesis occurs around the time of birth (40,000 new synapses per second), and the synaptic pruning process is completed by late adolescence.

Development of Neural Connections



zerotothree.org/2017agenda

Dr. Shazia then explained the statement that she had made at the beginning about ECD being a silent pandemic. She said that developmental delays are a significant burden on society, and it is crucial to refer children early for further developmental assessment if they show any signs of atypical development. Health professionals need to be aware of the developmental red flags that warrant screening and early referral, and a screening checklist can be used to identify children at risk. She further added that many people ask why we can't do developmental surveillance, which involves following one child over time. However, in Pakistan, this is not practical because most people do not see the same doctor year after year. Therefore, screening is a more feasible approach. Screening involves taking a snapshot of a child's development, and it can be done by a range of professionals, not just doctors. Surveillance systems are highly specialised, so it is important to focus on developmental screening and that's why the ShaMaq screening tool was developed, she said. The need for it arose because,

in typical children, parents may not be aware if their child is growing and developing properly. She explained that developmental screening is a basic tool that can be done by the community, school, or healthcare professionals, and it is essential to simplify developmental assessment in countries with limited resources.

Talking about the use of ShaMaq Screening Tool (SDST), Dr Shazia said that it is being used for early identification of developmental delays in normal children. It was constructed for an indigenous population and tested for inter-observer reliability. Normally, parents and even paediatricians or primary caregivers and physicians may not be able to tell if a child is growing typically. Therefore, it is important to create awareness about developmental delays and how they can be detected so that parents are informed, and they are able to take timely action. When ShaMaq was tested for the first time, nearly 10.5% delays were found in all children aged 3 and before that the same children had 23% delays. This shows that if we do not work together, more delays may occur. Subsequently, this was tested on 12000 children again and was found that 9.9% of the children show developmental delays. This highlights the importance of early intervention and research in identifying delays and providing support for affected children and their families.

Dr Shahzia said that early intervention involves addressing all domains of development together. For example, a child who is visually impaired may have difficulty speaking because the child is not processing as much visual information. By addressing all domains, we can help children reach their full potential and prevent behavioural problems. Parents also benefit from early intervention by having access to support and resources. She further said that using ShaMaq, just one out-patient unit in Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics at the University of Child Sciences, Lahore saw over 47,000 children in 2022 alone, addressing a range of developmental and behaviour disorders, such as speech disorders, GDD, learning disorders, CP, autism spectrum, and others. She shared the "one window model" which offers multidisciplinary services for the diagnosis, management, and disabilities & screening of developmental behavioural disorders under one roof. This model, she said, was introduced for the first time at the University of Child Health Sciences in Lahore in 1999, and it has since been followed by allied health professionals, doctors, and other departments. The department has now grown to 100 staff members.

She further introduced different teams for different disorders, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, sensory therapy, and autism and behaviour disorders.

Talking about the outreach programme of the University she said that the establishment of an outreach programme aimed at screening children between the ages of 2 months to 5 years of age for developmental delays has been delayed due to the impact of COVID-19 but despite the setbacks, the team remains committed to carrying out this important work once conditions improve. In 2018 alone, a community outreach pilot project using a Developmental Screening Tool successfully screened 300 children, she added.

She also talked about other programmes which are running at the University; Cochlear Implant Programme which has been conducting regular meetings for children with profound hearing loss since 2017, overseen by the Cochlear Implant Board. The programme has successfully completed 250 cochlear implants to date. Follow-up appointments are made for patients who come to the hospital for audio and mapping services, as well as for those who require speech and developmental therapy. The Learning Centre Programme; this programme run by specialised centers focuses on facilitating learning through training patients and trying to integrate them into mainstream schools. Some schools, she said, unfortunately, opposed this initiative, showing unwillingness to accommodate children with special needs in their schools whereas other organisations in Lahore have adopted this programme. She stressed the need for coordinated efforts to identify developmental delays and timely action by all the concerned stakeholders through collaboration rather than working in silos.

She concluded her presentation by emphasising the need for a proper ward at the Children's Hospital rather than just providing outdoor services or dedicated in-patient and she focused on the importance of solutions that must involve every member of the family, every community, and all relevant institutions.

The plenary session concluded with remarks from **Ms. Mehnaz Akber Aziz, Convener of the Parliamentary Child Rights Caucus and Parliamentary Secretary Law and Justice National Assembly of Pakistan**, who chaired the session.

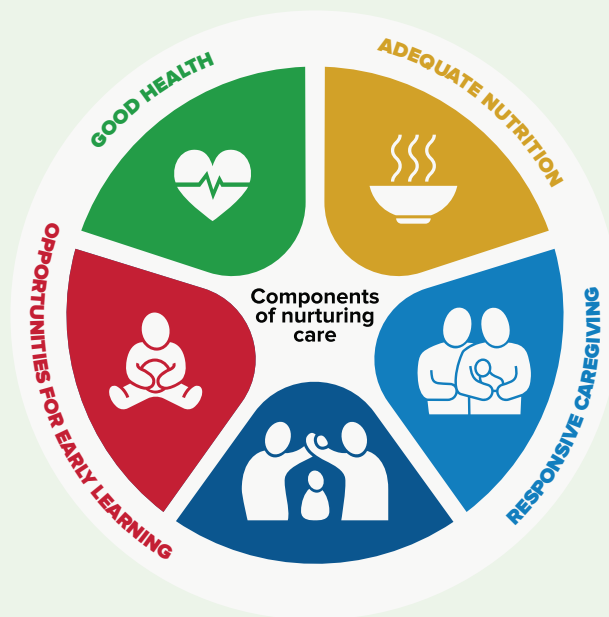
Ms. Mehnaz began by congratulating the organisers and praising the presentations given during the

conference. She highlighted the limited mention of "children" in the parliament and the lack of recognition of their existence as humans until they reach the age of 18. Ms. Mehnaz shared her involvement in presenting a resolution on children's rights and participating in the SDGs task force, which led to the formation of a subcommittee, specifically focusing on child rights, and the review of children's laws with the involvement of UNICEF. She mentioned the recent establishment of a child rights caucus as well. During her tenure as a member of the parliament, she successfully passed the Prohibition of Corporal Punishment Bill and the Protection of Domestic Workers Bill to ensure the protection of children in domestic settings. Ms. Mehnaz said that the presentations made during the conference were not just talks but actual interventions being made in the field. She asked the organisers to translate these interventions into legislative action in parliament.



Ms. Mehnaz highlighted the increasing focus on children's issues, particularly in the areas of brain development and nutrition. The alarming rise in stunting rates necessitates a strong focus on nutrition and vaccination, she said. She emphasised the importance of urging parliament to legislate for early childhood development (ECD) and suggested that ECD could be simplified into health, education, and vaccination initiatives within individual districts based on their specific needs. She further proposed overlapping different ministries, such as health and education, rather than creating a separate ministry for ECD. She also stressed the importance of adopting successful models rather than reinventing them.

Concurrent Sessions



Session I: Good Health

Presenters

Ms. Zarnosh Sarwar, Clinical Psychologist, Department of Developmental Behavioural Pediatrics University of Child Health Sciences, The Children's Hospital Lahore

Dr. Kamila Iftikhar, Children Hospital, Lahore

Dr. Nuzhat Sadia Qureshi, PhD Scholar, Allama Iqbal Open University

The theme of the first concurrent session was “**Good Health**”, with a focus on care before and during pregnancy, as well as practices, opportunities, and challenges related to the health of mothers and their children. The session discussed the importance of the rooming-in of mother and baby, skin-to-skin care, and early initiation of breastfeeding as crucial factors in promoting good health outcomes for both mother and child. Postpartum depression was also highlighted as a significant issue impacting the health of both mother and child. Additionally, the session explored the impact of mental health on parents and other caregivers, emphasising the crucial role of caregivers in promoting the healthy development of children.

This concurrent session was chaired by **Dr. Samia Rizwan from UNICEF** and moderated by **Dr. Naeem Zafar, the President of PEHCHAAN**. As a team, they ensured the smooth and efficient execution of the session, from the opening remarks to the conclusion of the discussion and to the question-answer session.

The first presenter, **Ms. Zarnosh Sarwar**, talked about ***Breastfeeding Practices and Knowledge in semi-urban areas of Punjab, Pakistan***. Breastfeeding, she said plays a critical role in an infant's growth and development and is considered the most effective tool for reducing infant mortality worldwide. To optimise the benefits of breastfeeding, it is recommended to initiate breastfeeding early, provide exclusive breastfeeding for infants aged 0-6 months, and continue breastfeeding until the child reaches 2 years of age.

Ms. Zarnosh explained that the concept of optimal breastfeeding is increasingly recognised in Pakistan. She substantiated her argument by sharing the findings of the National Nutrition Survey of 2018; according to which the rates for early initiation of breastfeeding were 43.4%, for exclusive breastfeeding was 48.4%, and for continued breastfeeding it, was 56.5%¹. However, some unsafe and unhealthy practices are still deeply rooted in Pakistani culture which include wasting the colostrum, and using pre-lacteal and top feed, in addition to the lack of early initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding.

Moving ahead, Ms. Zarnosh explained the objective and methodology of her study; the objective was to

assess the optimal breastfeeding practices and its knowledge in women of semi-urban areas of Punjab Pakistan. She further explained that this study was designed as cross-sectional research with a sampling technique of purposive sampling, conducted over a period of 3 months in the Paediatrics Outpatient Department (OPD) of Central Park Medical College in Pakistan. The study included 200 mothers of children aged less than 2 years, excluding mothers of adopted children or those requiring admission in the Nursery just after birth due to prematurity, sepsis, hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy, meconium aspiration syndrome or congenital heart disease. The institutional review board approved the study, and written informed consent was obtained from parents. Pre-structured questionnaires were used to collect information while maintaining confidentiality, and participants were given the right to quit at any time. The questionnaire included demographic information such as maternal age, education, mode of delivery, age of the child, and family monthly income. The main outcome measures were the knowledge and practices of breastfeeding. SPSS 25.0 was used for data analysis, and demographic data was presented using frequency and percentages. The results showed that 43.4% of the mothers initiated breastfeeding early, 48.4% exclusively breastfed for 0-6 months, and 56.5% continued breastfeeding till 2 years of age.

Maternal age was divided into three groups, with the majority falling into the 20-30 age group (73%). Maternal education levels were diverse, with the highest percentage of mothers having no formal education (34%). The mode of delivery was primarily

c-Section (58%). Most of the children were under 1 year of age (68%). Family monthly income varied, with over half of the participants reporting a monthly income of less than 20,000 PKR (51.5%).

Ms. Zarnosh further explained that the study also examined several variables related to breastfeeding practices among the 200 participating mothers of children under 2 years old. The results showed that 90.5% of mothers initiated the first feed to their baby within 1 hour after birth, while 2.5% did not breastfeed at all. The most common first feed offered was breast milk (colostrum), with 43% of mothers choosing this option. Exclusive breastfeeding was reported by 26% of mothers, while 74% reported giving other types of feeds in addition to breast milk. Of those who gave other feeds, formula feed was the most common (46.5%), followed by cow's milk (20.5%) and water (14%). The majority of mothers (68%) used a bottle to administer other feeds, while 9.5% used a spoon and 4% used a cup. Additionally, 82% of mothers reported waking their child after 2 hours for feeding, while 18% did not.

Ms. Zarnosh concluded her presentation by underscoring the need for increased awareness and education regarding optimal breastfeeding practices in Pakistan. The results, as explained by her, suggested that more efforts should be made to improve early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding, and continued breastfeeding till 2 years of age.

The second presenter, **Dr. Kamila Iftikhar** presented on the ***Impact of Screen Media Usage on Early Childhood Development***.

Dr. Kamila began the discussion by emphasising the importance of early childhood development (ECD), which encompasses optimal cognitive, language, socio-emotional development, and adequate growth

and nutrition. She highlighted that the age bracket for ECD is from 0 to 8 years, with the first 3 years being crucial for maximum brain growth. Dr. Kamila specifically pointed out that environmental factors, including the use of technology and exposure to screens, play a significant role in child development. Regarding screen time, Dr. Kamila defined it as the amount of time spent on television, mobile phones, tablets, video games, and computers. She stressed that excessive screen usage is associated with delayed acquisition of age-appropriate cognition, language, and social milestones. Moreover, she highlighted that increased hour of exposure to screen media result in various negative effects, including inattention and easily distractible behaviour, a risk factor for aggression and emotional reactivity, elevated sleep disruption in children, a risk factor for communication behaviour disorders and autism spectrum disorders, and reduced engagement in play-based learning activities.

Dr. Kamila further emphasised that the relationship between media and cognition is directly dependent on several factors. She specifically mentioned the age at which a child is first exposed to screen media, the context and content of the programmes being watched, and the number of hours spent engaged with screens as key factors influencing this relationship.

In her study, Dr. Kamila presented a case-control design. She divided the 100 children into two groups: one consisting of children with communication behaviour disorders (n = 50) and the other comprising typically developing children (n = 50). Children from both groups who had screen exposure exceeding 2 hours were included in the study. However, she excluded children with severe developmental delays or known developmental issues such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, or chronic diseases like heart disease, celiac disease, asthma, or any other chronic ailment.

To assess the developmental outcomes, Dr. Kamila used the ShaMaq Developmental Screening Tool, which is suitable for children of ages 6-8 weeks, 6-10 months, 18-24 months, 3-3.5 years, and 4.5-5.5 years. This tool evaluates four domains: locomotion and posture, vision and manipulation, hearing and speech, and socialization.

Dr. Kamila then proceeded to present the findings of her study, including the demographic characteristics of the participants, the behavioural comparisons



between children with communication behaviour disorders and typically developing children, and the developmental outcomes assessed using the ShaMaq Developmental Screening Tool.

Her key finding was that exposure to screen media at an early age and prolonged use of screens can lead to adverse developmental outcomes and behaviour issues in children. This is more evident in children with CBD as compared to typically developing children.

The third presenter, **Dr. Nuzhat Saadia Qureshi a PhD Scholar from AIOU**, shared the results of her ***Experimental Study on the Relationship Between Teachers' High Expectations and Student Learning***. Dr. Nuzhat shared the objectives of her study, which were to identify the relationship between teachers' high expectations and students' learning and to investigate how teachers' high expectations may affect students' learning. The study's hypothesis was that "Teachers' high expectations have a positive effect on student learning." She conducted the study on 70 Junior School students (Grade 2) between the ages of 6 and 7.

In her presentation, Dr. Nuzhat discussed the two main approaches educational psychologists use to understand learning: behavioural and cognitive approaches. She explained that motivation is an internal state or force that energise s, directs, and maintains behaviour towards a goal, which can be influenced by both internal and external factors. One of the key external factors, she said is teachers' self-efficacy; there is a close connection between teachers' self-efficacy and student academic achievement as teachers with high self-efficacy work harder and persistently with weak slow learners while those with low self-efficacy may become stressed and angry with slow learners and exercise strict discipline in the classroom.

The study used a pre-post-experimental design, with a teacher-made objective test with four items used as a pre-test measure. The experimental group was given verbal encouragement for two weeks, and after two weeks, another parallel objective test prepared by the teacher was used as a post-test measure. The results showed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test measures, supporting the hypothesis that high expectations positively affect student learning.

Conclusion of the Session by Dr. Samia Rizwan, UNICEF

Dr Samia Rizwan, who was chairing the concurrent session concluded it by saying that it is important to address child health and development issues in Pakistan timely. She stressed that the presentations underscored the need for increased awareness and education on optimal breastfeeding practices and the impact of excessive screen time on early childhood development. She also highlighted the need for targeted interventions and programmes to address these issues and improve the overall health and well-being of young children in Pakistan.

Session II: Adequate Nutrition

Presenters

Ms. Bushra Khan, University of Karachi

Dr. Saeed Anwar, Peshawar Medical College, Peshawar, Pakistan

Ms. Ayesha Zahid Khan, Aga Khan University-Human Development Programme(Virtual Presentation)

Dr. Hina Hadayat Ali, Assistant Professor, University of Education, Lahore (Faisalabad Campus), Pakistan (Virtual Presentation)

The theme of the second concurrent session was 'Adequate Nutrition', which covered a range of topics related to child nutrition. The session focused on issues such as undernutrition, including stunting, wasting, and overweight/obesity, and the challenges of scaling up nutrition through a multisectoral approach. The session also discussed the impact of urban settings on children's health and nutrition and the current status, opportunities, and challenges of ensuring food and nutrition security for every child. Maternal nutrition was also a key topic, exploring the problem, its impact, and potential solutions. Additionally, the session examined infant and young child feeding practices, including adverse or sub-optimal feeding practices and the possible solutions to address them. The session provided insights on how to ensure responsive feeding and care for young children.

Mr. Anteneh Girma Minas, Chief Nutrition, UNICEF chaired the session and **Mr. Baddar Uzaman, Policy Programme Officer, SUN Secretariate MoPDSI** moderated it.

The first presenter, **Ms. Bushra Khan from University of Karachi**, delivered a presentation on the ***Outcomes of a Study Focusing on the Adaptation of WHO's mhGAP for Maternal Mental Health and Well-being***. The objective of the study was to create capacity-building materials for maternity staff, enabling them to provide comprehensive and inclusive psychosocial support to women during childbirth. The study followed a Human-Centred Design approach, encompassing three phases: inspiration, ideation, and implementation feasibility. In the inspiration phase, national policies were reviewed, and interviews were conducted to assess the existing practices of psychosocial support in maternity care.

Ms. Bushra highlighted the identification of gaps in policy directives and their implementation, as well as the limited understanding and skills among staff to offer psychosocial support, as revealed by a formative study. In the ideation phase, a multidisciplinary team collaborated with maternity staff to adapt mhGAP and develop capacity-building materials.

She explained that two modules were created, focusing on comprehending and implementing psychosocial support. Subsequently, the materials were tested through the training of 120 maternity staff in public health facilities across Pakistan. System

feasibility was assessed by conducting post-training visits to health facilities. The materials were found to be pertinent and feasible for the labor room environment.

Ms. Bushra elaborated on the results, which indicated that the psychosocial support capacity-building materials expanded the utility of mhGAP, facilitating the provision of support to women during childbirth. This approach aimed to promote positive maternal birthing experiences and overall well-being, ultimately leading to improved maternal-child relationships and enhanced child development.

The second presenter, **Dr. Saeed Anwar** conducted a research study titled '***Nutritional Outcomes in an Integrated Early Childhood Development Project in a Rural Area of District Peshawar, Pakistan***'. The objective of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an indigenous nutrition intervention package in improving the nutritional growth of children participating in an integrated ECD programme.

The study utilised a before-after interventional study design and was conducted in the rural area of Ghari Sherdad in district Peshawar. Children under the age of 5 were assessed for weight, height/age, and mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) at the baseline, followed by additional assessments at months 1, 2, 3, and 4. Parental consent was obtained for the inclusion of malnourished children in the study. The intervention included activities carried out by trained nutritionists, focusing on improving knowledge about nutritious food and implementing behaviour-change

communication to enhance food intake, care, and hygiene practices. Additionally, healthy food cooking demonstrations were conducted for mothers of malnourished children.

Dr Saeed added that a total of 299 malnourished children received the intervention, with 47.8% being male and 52.2% female. The mean age at the baseline was 22.9 months (SD \pm 16.6 months). The baseline measurements for MUAC, weight, and height were 12.4cm (SD \pm 2cm), 8 kg (SD \pm 3.3), and 75 cm (SD \pm 13.6 cm), respectively. He said that during the follow-up visits, significant improvements were observed. The mean MUAC at month 1 was 13.0 cm (SD \pm 1.66 cm) ($P < 0.05$), month 2 was 13.1 cm (SD \pm 5.8 cm) ($P < 0.05$), month 3 was 13.2 cm (SD \pm 1.4 cm) ($P < 0.05$), and month 4 was 13.25 cm (SD \pm 1.8 cm) ($P < 0.05$), with statistically significant differences identified through paired t-tests when comparing each follow-up visit with the baseline. Similar significant improvements were observed in weight and height measurements at different follow-up time points.



Dr. Saeed concluded his presentation by emphasizing that the findings of this study provide valuable information for decision-makers in the health sector, both in the public and private domains. The results highlight the importance of developing and implementing appropriate nutrition education programmes in primary care settings to improve the nutritional outcomes of children.

Virtual Presentations

Ms. Ayesha Zahid Khan, from **Aga Khan University-Human Development Programme** conducted her research on **Assessing the Dietary Intake of School Children from Sindh-Pakistan**. She highlighted the persistent issue of child undernutrition in the country and its impact on growth, development, and school performance. Her research revealed that both rural and urban children had a low intake of fruits and

vegetables, with high consumption of bakery items, fast foods, and sugary drinks. Ms. Ayesha emphasised the shift towards unhealthy “Low Nutrient Density Foods” (LNDF), which are processed, nutrient-poor, and high in sugar, salt, and fats. She conducted data collection through dietary recalls and anthropometric measurements, finding that children consumed fewer calories and servings of essential food groups than recommended. LNDFs and added sugars were commonly consumed, indicating a rising trend of obesity and the potential for non-communicable diseases. Ms. Ayesha concluded that nutrition education, tailored to local resources and traditions, is crucial to promote healthy eating practices among school children. She recommended the development of a Nutrition and Hygiene Education Manual and systematic nutrition education programmes to empower children as advocates of change and encourage increased consumption of protein foods, fruits, and vegetables while reducing LNDF and added sugar intake. Counseling on tea consumption and its interference with iron absorption was also suggested.

Dr. Hina Hadayat Ali, Assistant Professor from the University of Education, Lahore (Faisalabad Campus), Pakistan conducted extensive research on the *triad factors that affect early childhood development as perceived by parents and teachers in Pakistan*.

She highlighted the negative impact of poverty, malnutrition, poor health, and inadequate care on children’s cognitive and social potential. Dr. Hina emphasised the importance of nutrition before and during pregnancy for fetal development and brain development. Her study aimed to explore the factors affecting early childhood development from the perspective of parents and teachers in Pakistan. The research utilized a descriptive and quantitative design, with a sample of 218 respondents. The data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire, and the analysis revealed that both parents and teachers identified poor nutrition as a significant factor affecting children’s cognition, emotions, growth, eating habits, and social behavior. There was a positive correlation between the perceptions of parents and teachers, supporting the hypotheses formulated. Dr. Hina concluded that nutrition and responsive parenting were key factors in early childhood development, as perceived by parents and teachers. She recommended promoting good nutritional choices, creating awareness, and implementing early childhood programs that foster healthy eating habits to ensure lifelong health and well-being.

Session III: Responsive Caregiving

Presenters

Ms. Syeda Saima Mazhar, National ECD Coordinator, AKES Pakistan, Malika Sultan, Regional ECD Advisor, Gilgit-Baltistan and Jamil Ahmad, Regional ECD Coordinator, Chitral, AKES, Pakistan

Dr. Naila Naseer, Assistant Professor, Continuing Education Department, Allama Iqbal Open University

Ms. Misbah Waqar, Phd Scholar, Allama Iqbal Open University

Dr. Fatima Rahman, Developmental Behavioural Paediatrician, Department of Developmental-Behavioural Paediatrics, University of Child Health Sciences & The Children's Hospital, Lahore

Dr. Rukhsana Durrani, Department of Early Childhood Care and Education, Allama Iqbal Open University



The theme of the third concurrent session was **Responsive Caregiving**. The session aimed to address the crucial role of secure emotional relations between children and their caregivers for promoting early childhood development. The session also emphasised building the capacity of parents and other caregivers to recognise the danger signs or red flags in the holistic development of their children from 0 to age 8 and timely response to their needs. Moreover, the session discussed what parents and other caregivers need to know to ensure responsive caregiving in the context of COVID-19, taking into consideration the challenges and limitations imposed by the pandemic. By bringing together experts, practitioners, and parents, the session provided an opportunity to share research-based knowledge, best practices, and effective strategies for promoting responsive caregiving and ensuring optimal early childhood development.

Ms. Ambreena Ahmed, Director of the Teachers' Resource Centre, chaired the session, while **Dr. Rukhsana Durani, lecturer AIQU**, acted as the moderator for the discussion, guiding the speakers and facilitating audience participation.

The first presenters, **Ms. Syeda Saima Mazhar, National ECD Coordinator, AKES Pakistan, Malika Sultan, Regional ECD Advisor, Gilgit-Baltistan and Jamil Ahmad, Regional ECD Coordinator, Chitral** talked about the *Transition Programme in Early Childhood Development*.



Ms. Malika began her presentation by highlighting that Aga Khan Schools operate in three regions of Pakistan: Gilgit-Baltistan, Chitral, and Karachi. In Gilgit-Baltistan, there are 123 schools, while Chitral has 45 schools, and Karachi has three schools.

The study conducted by Ms. Malika focused on the transition from the pre-primary class to primary grades. Through this study, they identified various challenges faced by students in primary classes, particularly with basic literacy skills. Students were struggling to cope with the middle school curriculum, leading to declining enrollment and community concerns.

The main purpose of the study was to enhance the understanding of the ECE (Early Childhood Education) curriculum and its alignment with the expectations of the primary grades. Ms. Malika emphasised the need to explore the factors contributing to these challenges and establishing minimum learning standards. At the time of the study, Pakistan's ECE national curriculum only covered the Kachhi class, lacking specific guidelines for the 2 to 3 years and 3 to 4 years age groups. To address these gaps, they defined minimum learning standards for the respective age groups and analysed the learning outcomes for primary grades, aligning them with the national curriculum. They also worked on revising pedagogical practices, refining their professional development framework, and revising the PD curriculum.

The methodology involved conducting interviews with key stakeholders, including parents, communities, teachers, school heads, and academic leaders. Classroom observations, literature review, and exposure visits to schools in Dubai were also part of the study.

Research findings revealed significant gaps in literacy education, particularly in English and Urdu. Teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical practices were identified as areas needing improvement. The study highlighted the importance of early literacy steps, such as phonological and phonemic awareness activities, read-aloud, storytelling, and comprehension skills. The classroom practices were found to be ineffective, with limited integration of hands-on activities.

Based on the research findings, Ms. Malika emphasised the need to revise the curriculum framework, implement academic interventions,

ensure a seamless transition from ECD to primary grades, and revise assessment practices. The study also emphasised the integration of 21st-century skills and the need to replicate specific interventions based on regional competencies and challenges.

During the presentation, Ms. Malika's colleague, Mr. Jamil, discussed the changes implemented following the study. They introduced a three-year pre-primary model, with separate pre-primary classes for two-year-olds, three-year-olds, and four-year-olds. They aligned the pre-primary learning competencies with grade one standards and improved collaboration between pre-primary and primary teachers.

Other changes included hiring qualified pre-primary teachers, providing rigorous training, improving student admission criteria, implementing bridging programmes, and introducing the Centropic Phonics programme. They also focused on improving literacy, reading, and writing skills, creating purposeful displays, developing digital learning resources, enriching the daily routine, and enhancing assessment procedures. Parental engagement and a reading programme were also emphasised.

Overall, the study underscored the importance of addressing the challenges in the transition from pre-primary to primary grades, improving pedagogical practices, aligning curricula, and enhancing student outcomes in early childhood development.

The second presenter, **Dr. Naila Naseer**, delivered a presentation on ***The Analysis of Early Learning Support by Parents at Home and Schools in ECE.***



She began her presentation by emphasising the significance of parents' active involvement in school activities and their support at home. Such involvement has been shown to have a positive impact on early childhood education and family literacy, ultimately

fostering a lifelong love for learning. Recognising parents' rights to be informed, provide input, and participate in key decisions regarding their child, both the OECD and UNICEF advocate for parental engagement in ECE services. Dr. Naila Naseer's research aimed to explore two dimensions of parental support: the support provided at home and the support provided in relation to school-related activities. Dr. Naila Naseer sought to investigate the relationship between income level, parental educational qualifications, and the early learning support provided by parents to their children at school and at home.

To conduct her research, Dr. Naila targeted parents in the Rawalpindi and Islamabad districts. From a population of parents, she randomly selected 200 individuals, with 186 parents responding to her self-developed questionnaire on early learning support provided by parents at home and in school for ECE level children. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, one focusing on home-based support and the other on school-based support, each containing ten items. The validity of the questionnaire was established through expert opinions and CVI analysis, which yielded a score of 0.91. Dr. Naila collected data through personal contact, reaching out to participants who did not initially respond via their provided email addresses obtained from household surveys. The questionnaire was sent to their emails using Google Docs.

The demographic results of Dr. Naila's study revealed that 61.7% of the participants were male, while 38.3% were female. The participants' literacy rates varied across different categories, including illiterate, primary, middle, matriculate, FA, MSc, BA, BSc, Masters, MPhil, and PhD. Notably, a significant proportion (47.9%) of the participants held a matriculate qualification. In terms of age distribution, the participants spanned various categories, with 29.4% falling between the ages of 31 to 40 years. The study encompassed both rural and urban populations, with 45.7% of the participants residing in urban areas. Regarding income status, the majority (47.8%) reported earning Rs.50,000 and above.

The findings from her research will contribute to the existing literature on early childhood education, offering valuable insights to parents, teachers, and policymakers alike. Understanding the importance of parental involvement in the education of young children, this research will aid in fostering effective partnerships between parents and educational institutions,

ultimately benefiting the overall development and success of children in their early years.

The third presenter, **Ms. Misbah Waqar** presented on the ***Awareness Campaign on Parental Training on Early Childhood Development and Care***, stressing that every child deserves the best start in life. This presentation was based on the UNICEF's awareness campaign on Early Childhood Development and Care implemented in different areas of Pakistan.

Ms. Misbah started her presentation by mentioning that UNICEF has supported the government to develop and implement parenting package based on a life cycle approach with a focus on promoting Key Family Care Practices. The package consists of a training manual, counseling cards, flyers and other communication materials.



She then shared the modules in detail which covered early childhood development in the awareness campaign; Module 1 emphasised the importance of early childhood development, nurturing care, positive parenting, and key family care practices. She explained that sensitive and critical periods of development impact lifelong development and achievements, and children need proper nutrition, good health, positive parenting through stimulation and sensory experiences, and protection from abuse, neglect, and toxins for the brain to develop. Module 2 covered counseling skills for parenting education, and Module 3 covered Key Family Care Practices, including spousal communication, family planning, involvement of men, protection from malaria, using bed nets, handwashing, maternal and child health nutrition, women and child protection, WASH, stimulation, and play.

Ms. Misbah explained that parents are among the most important people in the lives of young children, and parents sometimes lack the information and

support they need for good parenting. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the awareness level of parents about early childhood and care before and after the awareness campaign. The study used an experimental design with a pre-test post-test control group and purposive sampling.

Ms. Misbah explained that this study used the Early Childhood Parenting Assessment form as the pre-test and post-test to rate parents' knowledge and understanding of different aspects of early childhood development and care. Thematic analysis was used to identify the key themes and patterns. The analysis of the assessment forms and semi-structured interviews showed that the campaign was successful in increasing parents' awareness and understanding of early childhood development and care. Both male and female parents gained knowledge and practical skills on the topic.

Ms. Misbah conducted an evaluation based on the data collected from pre- and post-test responses from the awareness campaign on early child development and parenting. The analysis revealed that 30% of the participating parents were male, while 70% were female. Initially, both male and female parents demonstrated a lack of knowledge in these areas. However, following the awareness campaign, post-test responses indicated that both male and female parents exhibited improved knowledge and practical skills.

The findings underscored the effectiveness of the parent training programme, as there was a significant difference between pre- and post-test responses. Furthermore, the participating parents expressed satisfaction with the programme. Building upon these results, Ms. Misbah emphasised the need to extend the training period to allow for more comprehensive knowledge acquisition and practical skill development. Additionally, she suggested conducting assessments through a manual questionnaire, as some parents might face challenges using an app-based assessment. To enhance the study's reliability, Ms. Misbah recommended increasing the sample size.

The fourth presenter, **Dr. Fatima Rahman, a Developmental Behaviour Pediatrician at the University of Child Health Sciences Children's Hospital Lahore**, presented her **research findings on parenting practices and aggression in children with behaviour disorders**. Dr. Fatima underscored the importance of examining the influence of

parenting styles on behaviour disorders, as there is limited local literature in this area.



In her study, Dr. Fatima focused on children with autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and social communication disorder. She explained that parenting styles play a significant role in the psychosocial development of children and can have both positive and negative effects. Parents of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder were more likely to use negative control strategies, such as harsh discipline and low parental support. On the other hand, parents of children with autism spectrum disorder exhibited overprotective behaviours and decreased parental warmth.

Dr. Fatima highlighted that aggression is a prevalent issue among children with behaviour disorders, with a high percentage of children with autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder displaying aggressive behaviours. Aggression was found to be prevalent in children with ASD and ADHD, with rates ranging from 35-50% and 54%, respectively. She noted that aggression in these children is often reactive and associated with various challenges in communication, sensory function, and social interaction.

The objective of Dr. Fatima's study was to explore the relationship between parenting practices and aggression in children with behaviour disorders. The study involved 83 children between the ages of 3 and 12. To assess parenting practices, Dr. Fatima used the Multidimensional Assessment of Parenting Scale (MAPS), which evaluated both positive and negative parenting behaviours.

The results revealed that positive reinforcement and supportiveness had a significant impact on reducing aggression, while negative practices such as lax control and physical control were associated

with higher levels of aggression. Dr. Fatima also highlighted the influence of demographic factors on aggression. She found that lower maternal education and income levels were associated with increased aggression in children. This underscores the importance of considering family dynamics and socioeconomic status when addressing aggression in children with behaviour disorders.

In conclusion, Dr. Fatima emphasised that positive parenting practices, such as positive reinforcement, can reduce aggression and improve family functioning. She emphasised the need to develop strategies that focus on enhancing parent-child interactions and fostering positive parenting skills. Positive parenting reduces maladaptive behaviours and improves family functioning, reducing parental stress and stimulating child development. Furthermore, low-income and maternal education were identified as risk factors for aggression in children with ASD and ADHD. Thus, modifying parenting behaviour is an important aspect of addressing problematic behaviours in children with behaviour disorders. Dr. Fatima expressed her gratitude to her mentor, Professor Dr. Shazia Maqbool, and her co-authors for their contributions to the research. She also shared information about the hospital's learning center, which aims to prepare children with disabilities for inclusion in mainstream education.

The fifth presenter, **Dr. Rukhsana Durrani** from the **Department of Early Childhood Care and Education at AIOU** conducted a ***Study on Classroom Management and its role in the Teaching-learning Process at the ECE level.*** The focus of her study was on the management of classrooms in ECE, which is also known as 'Kachhi' classrooms in government schools in Punjab. Dr. Rukhsana intends to explore how different aspects of classroom management, such as discipline, response, and physical environment, impact the participation of students in the classroom and their overall learning.

She said that education at ECE level is critical for a child's development, and studies have shown that classroom management is positively related to successful schools. She conducted the study to investigate the relationship between classroom management and student learning with an emphasis on the male and female teachers' style of classroom management. The research is focused on government schools in Punjab's Salliwala area, where ECE classrooms are established. However, Dr. Rukhsana notes that there are no trained ECE

teachers in public sector schools in Punjab. Instead, primary school teachers are assigned to teach in ECE Kachhi classrooms.



To achieve the study's objectives, Dr. Rukhsana formulated two hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that there is no significant difference in classroom management between male and female teachers at the ECE level, and the second hypothesis was that there is no significant relationship between classroom management and the teaching-learning process at the ECE level. For the study, she used a sampling technique that divided teachers into two strata; male and female. Out of the 232 public schools in Sahiwal with ECE rooms, 44 male and 49 female teachers were selected to participate in the study. The research methodology included a questionnaire filled out by teachers and classroom practices observed by the researchers.

Dr. Rukhsana explained that her research findings indicated that classroom management is crucial in the teaching-learning process: the descriptive statistics presented by her indicated that classroom management practices such as suitable seating arrangements, distance from the board, and furniture design all score high in terms of management effectiveness. However, the management of play corners in ECE classrooms scores low, indicating a need for improvement in this area. She said that the relationship between play corners and student learning is often overlooked, and they are not being managed properly.

Concluding remarks by the Chair of the Session, Ms. Ambreena Ahmed, Director, Teachers' Resource Center:

Ms. Ambreena Ahmed, the Director of the Teachers Resource Center (TRC), began her concluding remarks by greeting the audience and introducing herself. She highlighted that TRC



had developed Pakistan's first curriculum on early childhood education back in 2002 and has since then trained more than 60,000 teachers and education stakeholders across the country. TRC is based in Karachi but it has a national outreach. Ms. Ambreena thanked all the presenters for their hard work in putting together impressive and insightful presentations. She also thanked the moderator, rapporteur, and all the participants for being patient and respectful listeners, asking intelligent questions, and enriching the knowledge base through dialogue and learning from each other. She congratulated Dr. Fatima for bringing a body of research on special needs children and inclusion, which is much needed in the education narrative. She emphasised the need for collaboration and synergy to overcome working in silos and networking opportunities that these kinds of platforms provide.

She highlighted 'Responsive Caregiving' and reinforced the theoretical premises of responsive and respectful caregiving as the ability of the caregiver to notice, understand, and respond to the child's needs, whether physical, emotional, social, language, or literacy development. Informed caregiving and parenting are critical in the early years as the brain is developing so rapidly, and the lack of it may impede emotional and language development. She emphasised the need for parenting campaigns, educating parents and teachers, striking a balance, and making sure that whatever is being done at home complements what is being done in school and vice versa. Ms. Ambreena ended her speech by thanking the audience and requesting the moderator to present the shields to the presenters.

Session IV: Responsive Caregiving

Presenters

Ms. Hadiqa Qaisar, MBBS Student, Medical College, Islamabad

Mr. Syed Abdul Basit, MS Scholar, International Islamic University, Islamabad

Ms. Zainab Hasan, an M.Phil student in the Department of Anthropology at Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad

Professor **Dr Shazia Maqbool, Developmental Pediatrics, University of Child Health Sciences, Lahore** served as the Chair of the session, while **Dr. Uzma Qudsia, from the World Health Organisation** took on the role of Moderator for the discussion, guiding the speakers and facilitating audience participation.

Dr. Hadiqa Qaisar, the first presenter, highlighted a ***Study on the Impact of Caregivers' Mental Health on Early Childhood Development Across Various Communities in Pakistan***. The study aimed to assess the developmental delays among infants and toddlers aged 6 to 30 months, evaluate the developmental levels of infants in different subpopulations of Pakistan, explore the influence of caregivers' mental health on early childhood development, and identify mental health problems among caregivers to enhance infant and toddler developmental outcomes.

Dr. Hadiqa emphasised that caregiver mental health problems can be a significant predictor of developmental delays among infants and toddlers. The mental well-being of caregivers can impact early childhood development through its influence on parenting practices. She emphasised that early relationships between infants and their parents, particularly the mother, form the foundation for future personality and intellectual development.

The study encompassed five regions in Pakistan, namely (A), (B), (C), (D), and (E) in northern Pakistan, representing diverse geographic locations and varying levels of economic development. The data collection team utilised the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) questionnaire to assess caregiver mental health. To analyse early childhood development outcomes and their correlation with caregiver mental health, the study employed the Bayley Scales of Infant Development III and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) across four distinct subpopulations in Pakistan.

The findings revealed that 48% of the sampled infants and toddlers exhibited cognitive delays, 52% experienced language delays, 53% displayed social-emotional delays, and 30% had motor delays. Moreover, the study indicated that 39% of caregivers

in the sample showed symptoms of at least one form of mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, or stress. The research further observed that a significant portion of caregivers did not engage in positive parenting practices, while many resorted to negative parenting practices.

Through statistical analysis, it was determined that displaying signs of mental health problems significantly and negatively impacted infant and toddler developmental outcomes. Dr. Hadiqa stressed the importance of society addressing caregiver mental health issues to enhance infant and toddler developmental outcomes in Pakistan. Additionally, the study found that caregivers exhibiting signs of mental health problems were significantly less likely to engage in interactive parenting practices.

Mr. Syed Abdul Basit, an MS Scholar from International Islamic University Islamabad, the second presenter and an expert in Child Rights and Islam, presented a study on ***The Basic Needs of Children According to UNCRC and its Comparison with Islam and Judaism***. He highlighted that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the first globally accepted agreement on child rights, accompanied by two optional protocols. The study aimed to examine the relationship between a child's needs and rights, distinguishing basic needs as a matter of charity and basic rights as a matter of entitlement with dignity.

Mr. Abdul Basit pointed out that the UNCRC has faced global criticism, particularly in the United States, for challenging parental authority and the core concept of child protection, even suggesting that children have no rights. However, specific articles within the UNCRC, such as Article 6 (life, survival, and development), Article 8 (protection and preservation of identity), Article 12 (respect for the views of the

child), and Article 19 (protection from violence, abuse, and neglect), do address the basic needs of children.

He highlighted that certain Muslim countries hold reservations and provisions regarding the CRC, interpreting it in alignment with Islamic Law. In Islam, parents have the responsibility to raise their children, with the obligation of ensuring their survival. Children must receive adequate nourishment, clothing, and protection until they reach adulthood, and access to proper education is considered essential.

Similarly, in Judaism, the survival of a child is obligatory, and neglecting the value of children's lives is seen as displeasing to God. It is the duty of adults to prioritise the best interests of children.

In conclusion, Mr. Abdul Basit emphasised the study's findings regarding the basic needs and rights of children as outlined in the UNCRC, Islam, and Judaism. While the UNCRC may face criticism, it remains the responsibility of parents to ensure the survival and development of their children, which is regarded as an obligation in both Islam and Judaism. It is crucial for adults to acknowledge their role in safeguarding children's well-being and actively work towards fulfilling their basic needs and rights.

The third presenter, **Ms. Zainab Hasan, an M.Phil student in the Department of Anthropology at Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad**, presented a ***System Analysis of Modern Maternal and Child Health Care Practices During Pregnancy***. She used qualitative research methods, including participant observation and interviews, to explore superstitions and anti-modern practices related to maternal and child health care during pregnancy. The presentation began with an introduction to the perception of antenatal care, child development, maternal health care services, and child health care services. Ms. Zainab then provided background information on the perception of traditional antenatal care, supernatural beliefs among pregnant women, religion and medicine, and home remedies. Ms. Zainab discussed the methodology used in the study, which included qualitative techniques and tools such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions. She emphasised the relevancy of the locale and the theoretical framework used, which was the world system theory, to explore the relationship between core, semi-periphery, and periphery countries.

In the discussion and results section, Ms. Zainab presented the cultural antenatal practices,

supernatural beliefs regarding pregnancy, perceptions regarding child development, and the changing behaviour towards traditional to modern healthcare practices. She highlighted the availability and access to doctors and the behavioural difference between private and government doctors, as well as doctor-patient dependency.

The conclusion of the presentation highlighted the factors influencing child development, such as the high illiteracy rate, unemployment, poverty, lack of information, lack of resources, and low quality of antenatal services. Ms. Zainab also mentioned the low facilities in government hospitals and the exploitation of materials. Finally, the validity of the theory used in the study was discussed.

Remarks from the Chair, Professor Dr Shazia Maqbool, Developmental Pediatrics, University of Child Health Sciences, Lahore, Punjab

Dr. Shazia Maqbool, as the session chair, emphasised the importance of utilising the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) as a tool for identifying developmental deficiencies in children. This suggests that DASS can play a significant role in assessing and addressing mental health issues in children.

In addition, Dr. Maqbool made two recommendations during the conference:

- 1. Strengthening Indigenous Practices:** Instead of dismissing indigenous practices entirely, Dr. Maqbool advocated for a combination of traditional and modern practices to educate, manage, and resolve issues related to child and maternal health during pregnancy. This approach recognises the value of cultural practices while integrating contemporary knowledge and techniques. By blending old and new practices, it is possible to create a comprehensive framework that caters to the specific needs of individuals and communities.
- 2. Addressing Audience Scarcity:** Dr. Maqbool proposed a solution to tackle the issue of limited audience participation in conferences. She suggested that students from the host university and other universities be offered full or half discounts on registration fees. By providing financial incentives, it becomes more accessible for students to attend and engage with such conferences. This recommendation aims to enhance knowledge sharing, collaboration, and academic discourse by increasing the diversity and representation of attendees.

Session V: Early Childhood Development in Emergencies

Presenters

Ms. Hajira Salam, an M.Phil Education Student, Allama Iqbal University

Ms. Aleena Ayub from Allama Iqbal University



The theme of the fifth concurrent session was **Early Childhood Development in Emergencies**. The session explored various sub-themes related to the impact of crises on ECD and the steps taken to mitigate their effects. The session covered topics such as the impact of COVID-19 on ECD and how parents and teachers dealt with the situation, supporting and building capacities of parents and caregivers to ensure ECD during and beyond the pandemic, and ECD in the age of climate change. Additionally, the session highlighted government initiatives for ECD in emergencies. The discussion aimed to identify challenges and opportunities for promoting early childhood development in emergency situations and to find ways to create a more resilient and responsive ECD system. **Dr Salman Kirmani, MBBS, DABMGG, DABP Associate Professor & Chair, Division of Women & Child Health, The Aga Khan University**, served as the chair of this session and **Mr. Jalal Hunzai, CEO of Rupani Foundation**, acted as the Moderator, guiding presenters, and facilitating audience participation.

The first presenter, **Ms. Hajira Salam, an M.Phil Education student at DNFCE AIOU**, discussed the **Challenges Faced by Primary School Teachers during the COVID-19 Pandemic in District Attock**. She highlighted that Early Childhood Education plays a crucial role in the academic success and future achievement of children. The study was descriptive in nature, and the population consisted of all primary school teachers in district Attock, from which a random sample of two hundred teachers was selected, out of which 100 were male and 100 were female teachers from rural and urban primary schools.

Ms. Hajira further shared that the findings of the study revealed that ECE classroom materials were insufficient for students, and most teachers

were not completely aware of the use of the latest technologies. She suggested that teachers require more training and facilities to face emergency situations like COVID-19 in the future. The study also showed a significant difference in perception between male and female teachers and rural and urban teachers about ECE.

Based on the study's findings, Ms. Hajira recommended that primary school teachers' training should be arranged to increase awareness of emergency situations and tackle them efficiently. She further recommended that a blended mode of education in the formal system should be adopted to mitigate the impact of pandemic situations on the academic performance of ECE students in the future.

The second presenter, **Ms. Aleena Ayub from Allama Iqbal University**, presented a study on ***Designing Activities for Moral Development in Early Childhood Education Classrooms***. This was based on the premise that children in their formative years are highly impressionable and can benefit from a structured approach to learning about morality. She said that she designed the activities carefully making sure that they are developmentally appropriate and promote the acquisition of positive social and moral values. For example, some activities focused on teaching children the importance of honesty, respect, and empathy towards others. These activities were designed to encourage children to think critically about their actions and the impact they have on others.

Ms. Aleena also highlighted the importance of incorporating storytelling into her activities. Stories are a powerful tool for helping children to make sense of complex concepts and can be used to teach important moral lessons. Ms. Aleena's activities included storytelling sessions, where children were exposed to stories that modeled positive moral behaviour and helped them learn about important values. To assess the effectiveness of her activities, she used observation checklists to track changes in the children's behaviour over time. She further said that the results of her study showed that the children who participated in her activities demonstrated a significant improvement in their moral development. Ms. Aleena explained that her study has important implications for early childhood education. It underscores the importance of providing children with a structured approach to learning about morality and highlights the role of play-based activities in promoting positive social and moral values. By designing activities that are fun, engaging, and developmentally appropriate, teachers and parents can help children develop a strong moral compass and set them on a path towards becoming responsible and empathetic individuals.

Virtual Presentation

Dr. Irfan Ullah Khan, Assistant Professor, Department of Education & Research University of Lakki Marwat, KP, Pakistan conducted a study to explore the ***perceptions of early childhood teachers regarding the usefulness of digital learning after the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on students' academic performance***. The closure of educational institutions during the pandemic negatively impacted education in Pakistan, leading to a decline in academic performance.

The study aimed to determine the perceptions of early childhood teachers in Districts Bannu, Lakki Marwat, and D.I.Khan regarding digital learning's usefulness and its effects on students' academic performance. The research questions focused on the perceptions of teachers in each district, while two hypotheses explored differences in perceptions among the districts and the effects of digital learning on academic performance.

The study emphasised the importance of digital learning in future education and the need for schools to have adequate technological facilities. It also highlighted the benefits of using technologies such as Google Classroom, Zoom, and Skype in achieving learning objectives. The study was conducted using a descriptive survey design, including all public and private primary schools in the selected districts, with a sample size of 103 respondents. The results showed that teachers in District D.I.Khan perceived digital learning to be highly effective, leading to positive impacts on academic performance compared to Districts Bannu and Lakki Marwat. The difference was attributed to the more advanced implementation of digital teaching methods in District D.I.Khan, while limited access to technological resources hindered progress in District Lakki Marwat. Overall, the study concluded that digital learning was most successful in District D.I.Khan, with positive developments in District Bannu, while District Lakki Marwat faced challenges due to poverty and limited resources.

Concluding remarks from the session Chair, **Dr Salman Kirmani, MBBS, DABMGG, DABP Associate Professor & Chair, Division of Women & Child Health, The Aga Khan University**

Concluding the session, he remarked that the theme, 'Early Childhood Development in Emergencies' explored various sub-themes related to the impact of crises on ECD and the steps taken to mitigate their effects. He also highlighted government initiatives for ECD in emergencies and the session's aim to identify challenges and opportunities for promoting early childhood development in emergency situations.



Session VI: Safety & Security

Presenters

Dr. Mamonah Ambreen, Lecturer of Gender & Women Studies Department, AIOU

Ms. Shahnaz Pirani, Deputy Head Elementary Curriculum & Development, Head Start School System

Ms. Inbisat Ansari and Ms. Hina Azhar, Developmental and Behavioural Department, The Children's Hospital & University of Child Health Sciences, Lahore

The theme of the sixth concurrent session was '**Security & Safety**'. It focused on the importance of creating safe and conducive environments for promoting Early Childhood Development. The session highlighted the significance of positive parenting practices versus Adverse Childhood Experiences, including neglect, violence, early and forced marriages, child labor, and displacement. It discussed how to identify warning signs of child abuse and neglect and how teachers, parents, and other caregivers could play their role in sensitizing and protecting children. The session also covered child rights interventions in Pakistan, including advocacy, policies, and implementation. The session aimed to increase awareness and sensitivity towards children's safety and security issues in Pakistan and promote a holistic approach to ECD. The session was chaired by **Dr. Shahzad Mithani, a Child Protection and Education Policy Expert** and moderated by **Ms. Farzana, a Child Protection Specialist from UNICEF**.

The first presenter, **Dr. Mamonah Ambreen, Lecturer, Gender & Women Studies Department, AIOU** conducted a study on *Parental Emotional Abuse and on Its impact on Early Childhood Development; A Study from Pakistan*. She noted that emotionally abusive behaviour can be an extreme form of necessary parental control. Dr. Mamonah highlighted that emotional abuse and emotional neglect are among the most prevalent types of childhood maltreatment and are associated with a range of poor mental health outcomes. According to Dr. Mamonah, emotional abuse can take various forms, including harsh, actions, and neglect. Parents can use their words to control, wound, entrap, and humiliate their children. They imprint messages on the minds of their children through their words and tone of voice, shaping the way their children view themselves.

Dr. Mamonah emphasised that emotional abuse can also come through actions that accompany words, such as physical intimidation, manipulation, and physical threats. Emotional abuse that comes through neglect includes indifference or inaction. She notes that emotional abuse has physical effects such as allergies/asthma, depression, anxiety, digestive disturbances, eating disorders, hypochondria, chronic fatigue syndrome, migraines, headaches, panic attacks, phobias, unexplained skin rashes, unexplained physical pain, and intense feelings of anger, rage, resentment, and bitterness.

Dr. Mamonah pointed out that emotional abuse can also have effects on relationships, including a lack of intimate relationships, codependency, inappropriate relationships, isolation from others, and excessive compliance or passivity. She highlighted that relationships can be scary and unpredictable for those who have been emotionally abused.

Dr. Mamonah conducted a qualitative study using convenient sampling and collected samples through online forums as the online world provides a safe space to discuss personal issues. She conducted five non-structured interviews and performed a thematic analysis of the data. The sample comprised two married and three single respondents whose age group was from 26-30, and who were members of toxic parenting groups online on Discord.

Dr. Mamonah's findings indicated that most of the respondents admitted to parental conflict at home, especially clashes between their mothers and fathers on trivial matters. Respondents also reported that childhood neglect from their families had affected them negatively and hindered their personality development. Dr. Mamonah highlighted that children who were emotionally neglected during childhood have a flawed concept of marriage, and some of them don't even want to have children of their own. They take marriage as a burden and feel emotionally unavailable to their partners. Dr. Mamonah emphasised that respondents also admitted to having confidence issues and anxiety as a result of emotional abuse.

The research presented by the second presenter, **Ms. Shahnaz Pirani, Deputy Head Elementary Curriculum & Development from Head Start School System**, focused on the *use of technology in early years education, and how it can be used to enhance the learning experience of young children*.



Ms. Shahnaz underscored that the literature supports the use of technology in early years education, citing empirical studies that demonstrate its benefits, such as the use of photo books in science activities and computers in classrooms for learning purposes. Furthermore, digital storytelling was highlighted as a powerful tool for engaging students in critical thinking and fostering meaningful dialogues. However, Ms. Shahnaz emphasised the contextual reality of technology misuse and the lack of guidance provided by parents to young children, resulting in a passive role for teachers who feel helpless in such situations.

The research questions addressed the perspectives of teachers and parents regarding the integration of technology in early years education, as well as how schools promote technology-based teaching in these classrooms. The findings of the research were presented under two themes: ***“Perspectives of Parents and Teachers towards Integrating Technology in Early Years Classrooms”*** and ***“The Role of Schools in Promoting Technology-Based Teaching in Early Years Classrooms”***.

Ms. Shahnaz highlighted that both parents and teachers expressed positive perspectives towards integrating technology in early years education. Both groups recognised the demand for 21st-century skills and acknowledged the potential of technology to facilitate their development in children. However, concerns were raised regarding the potential adverse effects of frequent technology use on children’s

mental and physical health, leading to a perceived need for some restrictions and conditions. The use of multimedia and visualisation techniques was found to be motivating and beneficial in teaching concepts, with parents expressing a desire for their children to have access to technology to ensure they do not fall behind.

Ms. Shahnaz further underscored the crucial role of schools in promoting technology-based teaching in early years education. Schools were seen as key agents in bridging the gap through innovation and effectively informing families about the curriculum to empower them in supporting their children. Additionally, she commented that schools can provide technology-related homework assignments and assist children in using technology appropriately. The head and administrative staff were identified as significant sources of support for resource allocation and the implementation of innovative teaching techniques in the classroom. Teachers believed that technology enhanced assessments through enjoyable activities, and anecdotal records indicated that students who learned through technology applications were more enthusiastic and attentive.

In conclusion, Ms. Shahnaz underscored that integrating technology in early years education significantly contributes to the cultivation of 21st-century skills and the enhancement of global competencies. To ensure digital literacy and provide an enriched learning environment, it is essential to offer optimal opportunities for children to explore and benefit from technology in pedagogical ways. Furthermore, teachers need to receive training to effectively utilize technology while maintaining a healthy balance between preserving the elements of childhood and leveraging the unique capabilities offered by technology.

The study conducted by the third presenter, Ms. Inbisat Ansari and **Ms. Hina Azhar, from Developmental and Behavioural Department, CH & UCHS**, aimed to ***Identify the Risk Factors for Language Delay in Children***. Language delay refers to the delay in the development or use of knowledge of language. Children with speech and language delay have a slower than normal language acquisition rate, which can impact their personal, social, academic, and vocational life.

The purpose of the study was to gain knowledge about the risk factors that could lead to language delay in children with no other comorbid disorder.

This information could help healthcare professionals and parents to better understand the reasons and take early intervention therapy steps.

The study used a self-made questionnaire with demographic and Yes/No choices answered by interviewing the parents of the child. Questions were asked from the population coming to Children's Hospital Developmental OPD, Lahore. The study design was a case-control study, and a convenience sampling technique was used. The results were generated by using SPSS version 25 through descriptive analysis and logistic regression.

The inclusion criteria for the study were children with delayed language development having normal cognition, hearing, and motor abilities. The exclusion criteria were children with comorbidity such as cognitive, hearing, motor disability, or ASD.

The study found that out of 120 children with the age range of 2-6 years, 60 were the parents of children with language delay and 60 were parents of normal children. The percentages of possible risk factors for specific language delay were 9% birth asphyxia, 25% pre-natal complications of mother, 15% pre-term/ underweight, 25% pre-natal complications, 35% post-natal complications, 63% screen time of duration more than 3 hours per day, 42% family history of language delay, 17% home environment issues resulting in 42% increase in behaviour issues with the child. The results revealed that the probable risk factors for specific language delay in children aged 2-6 years proved to be a child born pre-term or underweight, excessive screen time, and a family history of speech and language delay. Environmental factors that affect the language acquisition of a child are maternal education and family type, such as having a nuclear family. Some children with language delay also had a bilingual environment at home, but the required percentage was low, which shows that bilingualism is not considered a risk factor in such cases. The study concluded that children with delays also show more negative behaviour compared to those who do not have language delays.

Concluding remarks from the Chair, Dr Shahzad Mithani, Child Protection Expert



Dr Shahzad Mithani, a Child Protection Expert, made some important remarks. Firstly, he emphasised the significance of understanding the subject of child protection, implying that it is important for parents, teachers and stakeholders to learn about it so that they can play their role. He then talked about the prevalence of cybercrime and the lack of knowledge among parents and teachers on how to address it. He suggested that people need to be open to change and be willing to listen to children, who are ahead of them by 20/30 years, when it comes to technology.

Dr Mithani noted that parents and teachers tend to follow the same methods of teaching and raising children that they were subjected to. However, he emphasised that parents need to comprehend that the advancement of technology has brought a different generation, which requires different approaches in parenting and teaching.

Workshop

Workshop I: Early Childhood Development in Emergencies

Workshop II: Early Childhood Development, Diversity & Inclusion in Early Years

Workshop I: Early Childhood Development in Emergencies

The workshop focused on **Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Emergencies**, covered a range of topics related to the challenges of ensuring ECD in emergency situations. This workshop was conducted by **Ms. Tabinda Jabeen and Saira Shahab from the Teachers Resource Centre (TRC)** and was chaired by **Mr. Muhammad Rafique Tahir, Senior Advisor, Allama Iqbal Open University**.

Ms. Tabinda Jabeen and Ms. Saira Shahab initiated the workshop by presenting the work of their institute, the Teachers' Resource Centre (TRC). TRC is a non-profit and non-political organisation that focuses on the professional development of teachers and education stakeholders to uplift education standards in Pakistan. The institute has trained over 60,000 teachers and education stakeholders across Pakistan and works with both public and private schools.

The workshop highlighted the urgent need for learning resources in emergency contexts, such as the floods in Pakistan that resulted in the loss of human lives, damaged houses, agriculture, and livestock. She briefed that schools in Sindh became shelter homes for IDPs so schooling was disturbed. She further discussed that TRC offers a range of interactive material in Urdu, English, and Sindhi that serve as learning tools for students, teachers, schools, and communities to ensure continuity of education during emergencies.

Ms. Tabinda shared two resources developed by TRC for emergencies. The first is the Pehla Taleemi Basta (PTB), an educational resource kit for young learners that covers the basic concepts of key subjects, till grade 2. The kit comprises manipulative material for hands-on activities for children and provides a teachers' guide with useful suggestions for promoting initial literacy, numeracy, and science concepts and skills.

The second resource is a Subject-based Learning Kit for Primary, containing customized interactive learning material based on textbooks of grade 3, 4, and 5, which supplements 4 key subjects: English, Math, Science, and Social Studies. She further showed different sizes and color of shapes and explained that this is how colour concepts are taught

in primary schools. She also taught ways to learn vocabulary and counting with hands-on activities.



The workshop also included an activity for the development of meta cognition and fraction and showed some pencil grip activities for fine motor play and was followed by a question-and-answer session. The workshop was concluded by Mr. Rafique Tahir who emphasised on the Student Engagement for learning. The workshop provided a Child-to-Child approach towards learning teaching interface, emphasising the importance of effective learning tools and resources for young learners in emergency contexts.



Workshop II: Early Childhood Development, Diversity & Inclusion in Early Years

The workshop was conducted by **Dr Kausar Waqar**, a Senior Instructor at AKU and chaired by **Prof. Dr Humaira Bano**, Chairperson and Director of the Institute of Special Education, the University of Punjab, Lahore.

The second workshop held at the conference was about Early Childhood Development, Diversity, and Inclusion in Early Years. The session aimed to address the challenges faced by children from diverse backgrounds in accessing quality Early Childhood Development services. The workshop facilitators discussed the importance of acknowledging and valuing the diversity of children and their families in promoting inclusive and equitable ECD practices. The workshop also highlighted the need to address biases and stereotypes that can impact the quality of ECD services and limit opportunities for children from marginalised communities. Participants in the workshop discussed strategies for promoting inclusion and diversity in ECD programmes, including curriculum development, teacher training, and community engagement. The session concluded with a call to action for stakeholders to work towards creating inclusive and equitable ECD services that meet the needs of all children, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances.

Dr. Kausar Waqar who conducted the workshop, kick-started it by engaging the participants in a warm-up activity where they introduced themselves and their organisations. They shared their reasons for attending the workshop and highlighted their uniqueness.

Dr. Kausar emphasised that the workshop aimed to explore various concepts and questions surrounding diversity and inclusion in early childhood development. The participants delved into understanding the effects of diversity, examining inclusion from a child rights perspective, and exploring philosophical positions. They also discussed the importance of achieving socially inclusive societies through early child development and education.

The workshop participants actively engaged in conversations about diversity, discussing how it manifests in early years and the impact it has. Dr.



Kausar highlighted that diversity encompasses a range of different elements or qualities. In the field of sociology, diversity refers to political entities with members who have identifiable differences in their cultural backgrounds or lifestyles. The formation of a diverse group of participants from various backgrounds helped illustrate the concept of diversity and inclusion. In early years, diversity includes factors such as gender, ethnicity, disability, age, type of intelligence, religion/belief, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

The participants recognised that diversity in early years classrooms is closely tied to health, social, and economic well-being. They identified several challenges and issues, including financial hardships, poverty, inadequate housing, insufficient knowledge about healthy foods for young children, socio-economic inequality, limited access to services, lack of adult learning and training opportunities, complex health issues for both children and parents related to poverty, insufficient parenting support and



information, risk of domestic and community violence, young parents lacking support, unemployment, and limited opportunities for improving employment outcomes.

Dr. Kausar highlighted the importance of addressing values, attitudes, and culture in the early years. The participants emphasised the need to recognise young children's social competence, explicitly address their experiences and concerns, and make a positive impact. The workshop also shed light on the concept of ethnocentrism, which involves judging other cultures based on one's own cultural standards.

Inclusion, as Dr. Kausar emphasised, is a process that values all individuals and recognises their unique attributes, qualities, and ways of being. The participants acknowledged that children's rights are central to good inclusive practices. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) outlines the fundamental human rights of children aged 0 to 18, including the right to survival, development of their full potential, protection from harmful influences, and participation in family, cultural, and social life.

Creating inclusive practices requires organisations to develop their ethos, policies, and practices in a way that accommodates all learners and meets their individual needs. The participants highlighted the importance of both social inclusion, which involves a sense of belonging and being valued, and academic inclusion, which entails providing support for successful learning. They emphasised the significance of considering the child and their family within their ecological context.

During the workshop, philosophical positions were discussed, underscoring the potential limitations of focusing on risk and deficits, as it places the problem solely on the individual child. This critical evaluation prompted a reconceptualisation that considers the learning contexts and leads to a broader understanding of diversity. This broader understanding incorporates concepts such as giftedness, gender, social background, learning variations, behavioural concerns, cultural and linguistic differences, and disabilities. The participants recognised that terms like "diverse abilities" and "diverse learners" promote acceptance of differences, while constructs like "diverse learning rights" and "learners in diverse classrooms" reflect newer social models that acknowledge the role of

social institutions in creating disabling circumstances. In conclusion, Dr. Kausar emphasised that human constitution and development primarily occur through interactions with others in diverse social contexts. The participants recognised that interactions are central elements when analysing the social aspects of human development.

Dr. Humaira Bano, chairing the workshop, shared closing remarks highlighting the significance of recognising children's rights and promoting inclusive practices that support their physical, mental, and social development. She reiterated the importance of considering interactions and social contexts in understanding human development thoroughly.

Panel Discussion I:

**Role of Distance and Non-Formal Education in Early
Childhood Development**

Panel Discussion I: Role of Distance and Non-Formal Education in Early Childhood Development

Panellists

Panellist I: Mr. Abid Gill, Deputy Chief Advisor of AQAL JICA

Panellist II: Mr. Bilal Aziz, Programme Specialist and Project Coordinator of AQAL, JICA

Panellist III: Dr. Muhammad Athar Hussain, Associate Prof. Department Distance, Non-formal & Continuing Education, AIOU

The panel discussion on the role of distance and non-formal education in early childhood development aimed to explore the potential of these education modalities in promoting holistic ECD, especially in marginalised communities where formal education is not accessible. The panelists discussed various approaches and models of distance and non-formal education that can effectively contribute to the early development of children, such as early childhood learning centers, home-based learning, play-based learning, and parental education programmes. They also highlighted the importance of using technology and digital tools to enhance the quality and effectiveness of distance and non-formal education. Dr. Muhammad Ajmal Ch. served as the chair for the panel discussion. He is also the Chairman of DNFCE (Directorate of Non-Formal and Continuing Education) and has vast experience in the field of education. Dr. Naila Naseer moderated the discussion.

Panellist 1: Mr. Abid Gill, Deputy Chief Advisor of AQAL JICA

Abid Gill highlighted the importance of non-formal education (NFE) in early childhood development (ECD) during the panel discussion. He stated that NFE provides more flexibility and innovation adoptability for ECD programmes. Mr. Abid also mentioned that policy provisions for ECE are included in all policy documents and non-formal education. However, attracting the right age group for education is still a challenge, and ECE is one strategy to address the issues of non-formal education. Mr. Abid emphasised the need for sufficient resources to integrate ECE with non-formal education effectively. According to him, distance between the educational institutions and people is the primary reason for issues in ECE. Safety environment and limited resources, such as financial, human, and physical resources, are also major challenges in the promotion of ECE. He suggested that NFE is the answer to all these issues as it is designed to be inexpensive.

Mr. Abid further explained that infrastructure for ECE needs to be added, and NFE is an inexpensive model. The cost for NFE is 200 per student per month, whereas formal education costs around 1000 per student per month, making it a less costly option with fewer resources required. He also mentioned that there are successful models for NFE in Asian countries.

In conclusion, Mr. Abid stressed the effective role of NFE in the promotion of ECE, which can address the challenges of distance, safety, and limited resources. He suggested that policymakers should allocate sufficient resources to integrate ECE with NFE and create an inclusive education system that caters to all children, including those who are unable to access formal education.

Panellist 2: Mr. Bilal Aziz, Programme Specialist and Project Coordinator of AQAL, JICA

During the panel discussion on the role of distance and non-formal education in early childhood development, Mr. Muhammad Bilal Aziz discussed various strategies for managing out-of-school children (OOSC). He highlighted that the lack of access to schools in remote areas with floods often results in a high number of OOSC. He suggested that non-formal education could be the solution to this problem and cited practical examples such as the Children's Global Network, which delivers NFE to children, leading to community-based education across the country. Mr. Bilal emphasised the need for indigenous solutions as a model for ECD and the inclusion of content for children under five years old in education programmes. He emphasised that community-based solutions for ECD are necessary due to the limited budget and low GDP rate of the country for education. The Sindh Education Foundation was presented as a

model for an independent NGO for the promotion of ECD.

Mr. Bilal also pointed out that the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has potential experts and staff for the development and promotion of Early Childhood Development. He suggested exploring early childhood care practices through NFE in developing countries. By doing so, it would be possible to devise effective strategies for promoting early childhood development and improving the quality of education in these countries.

Panellist 3: Dr. Muhammad Athar Hussain, Associate Prof. Department Distance, Non-formal & Continuing Education, AIOU

Dr Muhammad Athar Hussain highlighted the need to introduce good health and nutritional programmes through non-formal education (NFE) as a means

of achieving the goals of ECD. He suggested that community engagement is necessary to achieve these targets and emphasised the use of online modes for distance learning and digitisation systems for awareness campaigns. Additionally, he proposed using the four TV channels owned by AIOU to record and share these resources with the masses.

Dr. Athar stated that NFE had previously been focused on literacy programmes, but the need for good health and nutrition practices should also be introduced through NFE. He stressed the importance of engaging the community to achieve ECD targets and using technology to disseminate information about ECD. Overall, he underscored the importance of using innovative approaches to increase access to ECD programmes and to ensure that these programmes are effective in promoting children's health and wellbeing.

Day II Proceedings

PLENARY Session II:

Nurturing Care Framework - Plans, Advocacy, and Implementation in Pakistan- How this Compares with the Region, South Asia?

Speakers

- Ms. Mita Gupta - UNICEF Regional Advisor on ECD
 - Dr Eva Oberle, Assistant Professor, Human Early Learning Partnership, the School of Population and Public Health, University of British Columbia
 - Mr. Guy Le Fanu, Senior Global Technical Lead, Education Sightsavers, UK
 - Mr. Badar Uzaman, Programme Policy Officer, SUN Secretariat, MoPDSI & Dr Saba Shuja, UNICEF
 - Ms. Sehar Taimoor Khan, Education Advisor, Save the Children, Pakistan
-

Day – II of the conference started with a recap of Day – I and followed by Plenary II. The theme of Plenary Session II was ***Nurturing Care Framework - Plans, Advocacy, and Implementation in Pakistan - How this Compares with the Region, South Asia?*** The session aimed to discuss the implementation of the Nurturing Care Framework in Pakistan and compare it with other countries in the South Asia region. The session also included plans and policies related to early childhood development and advocacy efforts for nurturing care, and the challenges faced in the implementation process. **Dr. Baseer Achakzai, the Director General Health, the Ministry of National Health Services Regulation and Coordination**, served as the Session Chair while Dr. Naeem Zafar, the Chairman of PAFEC Board of Directors, moderated the session.



Ms. Mita Gupta, the UNICEF Regional Advisor on ECD was the keynote speaker for this session. She spoke on the main theme of Plenary II, ***'Importance of Nurturing Care Framework – What is happening in relation to this in South Asia?'*** Ms. Mita started her presentation by explaining that UNICEF's work in promoting early childhood development in the region is based on the Nurturing Care Framework which recognises that parents and caregivers are essential for providing the nurturing care that children need. She emphasised that ensuring nurturing care for children requires support at all levels, and all stakeholders have a role to play.

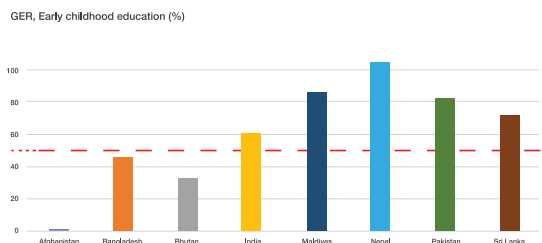
Ms. Mita further talked about the conditions of all children under the age of five living in South Asia; approximately half of the children are not developmentally on track due to poverty and other determinants. It is estimated that 40-50% of children in this age group are at risk of poor development.

Additionally, around 60-90% of children are experiencing violent discipline. She stressed that prolonged exposure to violence, abuse, and neglect in the early years can have a profound and lasting impact on children's lives and overall development. She further commented that the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures have also affected young children's education across the region and the world. The impact of COVID-19 related school closures has been significant, with 22 million children missing out on pre-primary education. Furthermore, approximately 25-35% of children aged 36-59 months are not developmentally on track, and it is estimated that an additional 3 million children have fallen behind due to the school closures.

Sharing the below figures, Ms. Mita discussed the access to early childhood education in the South Asian region. She highlighted that some countries, like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Bhutan have

critical issues with access to early years' education, while others, like Nepal, Maldives, and Pakistan, have relatively high access to early years' education services.

Enrolment in early childhood education



However, she added that there are inequities in terms of access to early childhood education, including gender disparities and lower participation rates for children with disabilities as shown in the image below. Expanding on the image, she stressed that these disparities are already apparent at the early childhood education stage, which is unusual, as gender disparities are typically more apparent at later levels of education.

Disparities in access to early childhood education

	Gender parity Index	Attendance in ECE programmes	
Afghanistan	1.17		
Bangladesh	1.05	19	13
Bhutan	0.99		
India	1.01		
Maldives	1.06		
Nepal	0.87	62	34
Pakistan	0.88	21	14
Sri Lanka	1.06		

She also discussed the enabling environment, pointing out that most countries in the region have specific policies, plans, and strategies in place to promote early childhood development. Additionally, all countries have legislation in place to provide maternity leave for mothers of newborns, although very few countries have provisions for paternity leave.

Despite the challenges, Ms. Mita emphasised that there are important initiatives being undertaken across countries in the region to promote early childhood development. She provided examples of initiatives framed around the five strategic action areas for operationalising the Nurturing Care Framework i.e i. Lead and invest ii. Focus on families and their communities iii. Strengthen services iv. Monitor progress v. Use data and innovate. Below she shared some examples of the programmes being designed

and implemented around these strategic actions:

1. Lead and Invest:

- i. Costed-multisectoral ECD plans being developed in Bangladesh and Bhutan.
- ii. Family friendly policies: Mothers@Work programme in the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh. This programme supports maternity protection and breastfeeding promotion, leading to increased knowledge about breastfeeding and hospital infant feeding practices among the workforces. It has also resulted in greater retention of female workers, benefiting employers, employees, and their families and children.

2. Focus on Families and Strengthening Systems:

She shared that many countries in the region are implementing different parenting programmes, which is a positive development; for example, parenting packages are being developed and implemented in Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan. However, more efforts are needed to take these programmes to scale so that all children and their parents and caregivers can benefit from them, she added.

3. Monitor Progress

- i. Monitoring progress is crucial for promoting Early Childhood Development (ECD), and the ECDI 2013 tool serves as an effective monitoring mechanism. This tool assesses the development and progress of children aged 24 to 59 months. Two countries in the region, Sri Lanka and Nepal, have conducted surveys using this tool to establish a baseline. Sri Lanka led the survey, while Nepal conducted it amidst the challenges posed by COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures. The findings from these surveys highlighted the significance of interactive remote learning modalities during the school closures. It was observed that innovative approaches involving teacher-student interaction had a positive association with children's developmental progress.
- ii. There are standards in place, as well as quality service standards at the regional level that can be used by countries in their specific contexts. In the context of COVID-19, there has been an increase in engagement with parents and caregivers in the region, leading to innovative teaching modalities. Low-tech modalities, such as sending voice messages, text messages, providing a phone call, and using WhatsApp, have been used to

reach out to parents and caregivers. One initiative that has carried on beyond the pandemic is the home-based learning programme, providing an alternative modality for children to engage in early childhood education.

4. Scale up and innovate:

An initiative called Project Play has been introduced in Pakistan, with UNICEF supporting its implementation in the province. It involves the transformation of packaging for ready-to-use care-specific kids into toys to promote play in context, reaching out to non-nursing children. This innovative approach could be tried out in Afghanistan and other countries in the region as well.

In conclusion, Ms. Mita provided an overview of the progress made in early childhood development in the region. The presentation highlighted the efforts of countries in implementing parenting programmes, the use of monitoring tools to track progress, and the development of quality service standards for young children. The presentation also touched on the importance of innovations in reaching out to parents and caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic. While progress has been made, there are still challenges in implementing parenting programmes across different parts of the region and reaching all children and their caregivers.

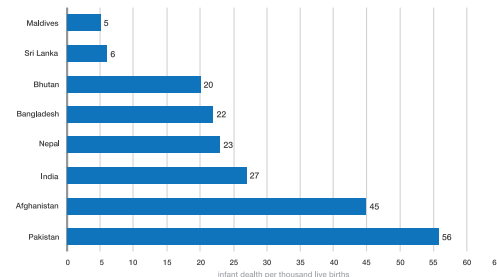
Dr. Abdul Wahab Yousafzai, MBBS, FCPS, Shifa International Hospital, Islamabad presented the study titled *'Highest Prevalence of Maternal Depression in South Asia and 40% Stunted Children: An Overview of the Missing Links to Inform Child Development Strategies in Pakistan'*.



He started off his presentation by discussing the infant mortality rates between 2020 and 2025 in South Asia, which is measured by infant deaths per

1,000 live births, varying from as low as of 6 in Sri Lanka to as high as of 56 in Pakistan. To substantiate the numbers, he shared the below chart of infant mortality rates in South Asia:

Infant mortality rates in South Asia between 2020 and 2025, (infant death per 1,000 live births)



Moving forward, Dr. Abdul Wahab discussed that undernutrition is the biggest culprit in nearly half of all deaths in children under 5 years old, with a severe risk of death from childhood pneumonia, dramatically increasing with malnutrition severity. Stunted growth due to malnutrition also puts children at a higher risk of dying from infections, increases the frequency and severity of these infections, and delays recovery time. Stunting prevalence has only decreased from 33.1% in 2000 to 22% in 2020, despite global efforts to address the problem.

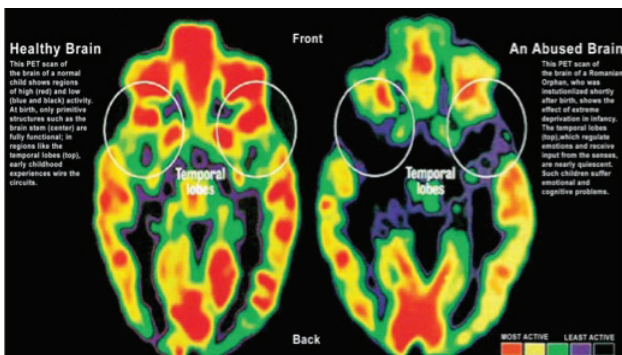
Dr. Abdul Wahab pointed out that maternal depression is considered the second biggest culprit in childhood development. It has an unfavorable effect on hospitalisation and mortality in children, with antenatal depression having been associated with preterm birth and low birth weight, even in developed countries. Postnatal depression is a strong predictor of undernutrition in infants, with children of mothers suffering from perinatal depression having a 40% increased risk of gastrointestinal infections and a 27% increased risk of lower respiratory infections. The systematic reviews of maternal depression and early childhood growth show that if the infant population were entirely unexposed to maternal depressive symptoms, 23% to 29% fewer children would underweight or stunted. Children of mothers with perinatal depression also have a higher risk of missing more than 50% of childcare visits during childhood.

In his presentation, Dr. Abdul Wahab discussed the prevalence of maternal depression in Pakistan and its impact on children. According to studies, postpartum depression is particularly high in South Asia, with a rate of 31% in Pakistan. Furthermore, two studies conducted in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province revealed an alarming 80% prevalence of

antepartum depression. Despite these numbers, maternal depression is often overlooked in low- and middle-income countries, leading to long-term negative effects on children.

Dr. Abdul Wahab highlighted the significant role of antenatal depression in childhood development, explaining that it increases the risk of maltreatment in offspring by nearly 4 times. Furthermore, children exposed to both antenatal depression and child abuse face an almost 12 times greater risk of developing psychopathology compared to those not exposed. Maternal depression is also associated with a 2-3 fold increased risk of perpetrating physical abuse, psychological aggression, and medical neglect. Childhood neglect and abuse in its worst form can have profound long-term consequences on child development.

To illustrate the impact of extreme deprivation in infancy, Dr. Abdul Wahab presented two PET scans of the brain. One scan showed the brain of a Romanian orphan who experienced institutionalisation shortly after birth, displaying minimal activity in the temporal lobes responsible for regulating emotions and receiving sensory input. This deprivation can lead to emotional and cognitive problems, indicating an “abused brain.” In contrast, the scan of a normal child’s brain exhibited regions of high and low activity. The primitive structures are fully functional at birth, but regions like the temporal lobes wire the circuits with early childhood experiences.



Furthermore, he highlighted concerning statistics regarding gender-based violence in Pakistan. He noted that 53% of girls aged 15-19 years and 34% of boys aged 15-19 years believe that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife for various reasons. The prevalence of violence against women since the age of 15 is highest in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, followed by Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, and Pakistan as a whole.

Drawing attention to the long-lasting impact of abuse, Dr. Abdul Wahab emphasised that young girls who experience abuse are more likely to face further victimisation in adulthood. Pregnant women with a history of physical or sexual abuse also have higher odds of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Additionally, maternal history of childhood maltreatment is associated with lower child intracranial volume, indicating the intergenerational and neurodevelopmental consequences of abuse. Mothers who were maltreated as children, especially those who experienced emotional or sexual abuse, are at an increased risk of postpartum depression. Consequently, addressing and treating postpartum depression may help break the cycle of intergenerational maltreatment.

Dr. Abdul Wahab concluded his presentation by sharing some take-home messages from his research. Just focusing on malnutrition is not going to address the problem of stunting in Pakistan:

- **We knew in 2004 that maternal depression and stunting were associated. Yet here we are in 2023, with 40% of our future youth, our social capital clinically stunted.**
- **Addressing maternal depression will not be possible without recognition of underlying deep-rooted core societal issues such as GBV, childhood abuse in homes and schools and in the communities.**
- **Depressed patients with childhood trauma have been shown to have better response to psychotherapy than medication, therefore, there is a need for trauma-informed MHPSS services to be integrated into community programmes that address malnutrition.**
- **Rather than failingly trying to address what’s in front of us, we should aim for a generational change by investing in our children today, providing them with safer environments and a protective and enriching society so that when they grow up to be mothers and fathers, they can become healthy parents to physically and emotionally healthy children.**

Dr. Eva Oberle, Assistant Professor, University of British Columbia’s School of Population and Public Health, delivered a presentation on *Positive Child Development and Strategies for Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing in the School Context – Virtual Presentation*. Dr. Eva began by acknowledging that her work took place on the traditional ancestral and unceded territories of the

Musqueam people, recognizing the influence of colonial perspectives and research in Canada.

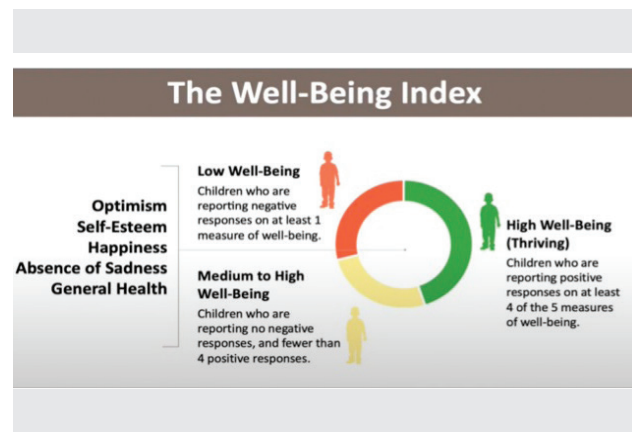


Dr. Eva highlighted her team members, with a special mention of Salima Kerai, her doctoral student who had conducted research with her in Pakistan. The focus of Dr. Eva’s talk was the Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI), which is a self-report survey completed by children and it was developed because it was realised that in order to understand positive youth development and promote well-being in childhood, data is needed which is a catalyst of action. MDI recognises that children grow up in various environmental contexts, such as family, school, culture, peers, community, and society, which all shape their positive development. The survey serves as a tool to assess and monitor development from early childhood to adolescence, identifying sensitive periods for intervention.

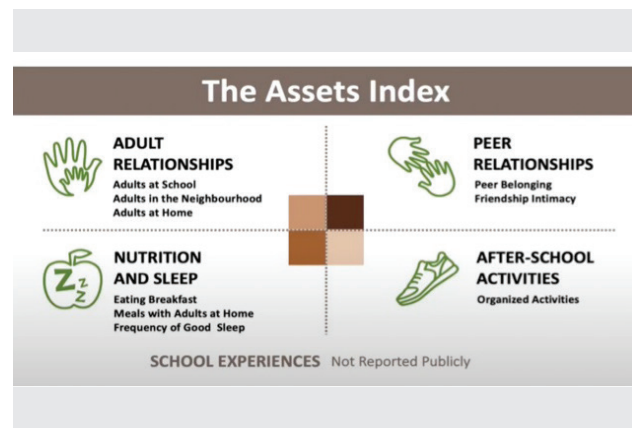
Dr. Eva presented an overview of the data collected over the years, which is growing every year, with close to 30,000 data points collected this year again. The MDI survey is completed by children in grades four to eight and it is a validated survey provides a population-level assessment of positive youth development. Dr. Eva explained that the population level part is crucial because to bring a change in the population, a comprehensive understanding of how children are doing is essential. The MDI was developed to understand positive youth development, focusing on positive indicators like social and emotional development, connectedness to peers, family members, and adults in school.

Dr. Eva explained that the MDI survey includes over 100 items such as optimism, satisfaction with life, and self-esteem. Anxiety and depressive symptoms are also measured, and the absence of such symptoms is considered an indicator of positive development and resilience.

She then explained their partnership with schools to report and compile data on children’s well-being. The data is packaged into knowledge to action product so different measures are packaged into a well-being index that considers multiple measures, including optimism, self-esteem, happiness, sadness, and general health. The index helps schools understand how many students are thriving, how many have medium to high well-being, and how many have low well-being. This information allows schools to identify areas for improvement and implement programmes and interventions accordingly.



Additionally, the team has developed an assets index that focuses on connectedness assets that support children’s thriving. Dr. Eva mentioned that the website contains more information about the assets index and how it can be used.



Dr. Eva shared trends in the data, highlighting a decline in well-being among grade seven students even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The decline is particularly evident in grade seven, although there is also a slight dip in grade four, which may be attributed to the impact of COVID. However, in grade seven a significant deterioration in mental well-being was observed. Potential factors contributing to this decline were the

increased use of social media and screens, reduced in-person socializing time, decreased health-promoting behaviors, and exposure to global concerns. She further elaborated that the findings consistently align with all the well-being indicators included in our survey. When considering well-being, it is crucial to establish a correlation between well-being and assets. Notably, it was observed that higher reported assets correspond to higher levels of well-being among children.

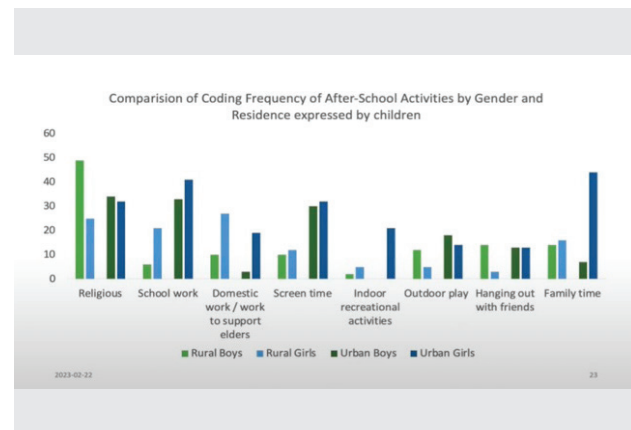
Dr. Eva suggested that focusing on assets becomes an essential aspect within the school environment. Working on assets entails implementing strategies and initiatives that foster positive youth development through various means, such as establishing programs to promote a positive school climate, implementing anti-bullying measures, and providing interventions that facilitate meaningful connections between teachers and students.

Dr. Eva then further explained that although these efforts may be specific to Canada or even British Columbia, it is worth noting that lower and middle-income countries like Pakistan lack substantial data on a large scale. This limitation prompted Dr. Eva's PhD student, Salima Kerai, to step forward and express her desire to address this issue through her dissertation work. She has successfully adapted the Middle Development Framework for Youth to the context of Pakistan over the past few years.

Dr. Eva then discussed the adaptation of the MDI for use in Pakistan by her PhD student, Salima Kerai. Salima worked with researchers at Aga Khan University, school leaders, and community members in Pakistan to ensure the survey's relevance and cultural appropriateness. Dr. Eva emphasised that this was not simply a literal translation of the instrument, but an adaptation to consider what positive youth development means in the specific cultural context of Pakistan. For example, involvement in religious activities and communities was identified as an important part of positive youth development in Pakistan.

Dr. Eva pointed out that Ms. Salima spent a significant amount of time with children in schools, conducting focus groups to ensure that the survey questions were understood and meaningful to them. Some questions did not work in the same way in Pakistan as they did in Canada, so Ms. Salima modified them to better reflect the experiences of Pakistani youth. Recently, she completed a large-scale data collection using the adapted MDI, which is called the **Pakistani MDI Measure Instrument (PMDI)**.

Some findings from Salima's focus group discussions shed light on out-of-school time and its significance as an indicator of positive youth development. Out-of-school time refers to the unstructured hours after school, which can be utilised in various ways to contribute to positive youth development. Some of these activities include engagement in school-related work, homework, and tutoring, commonly known as "tuition."



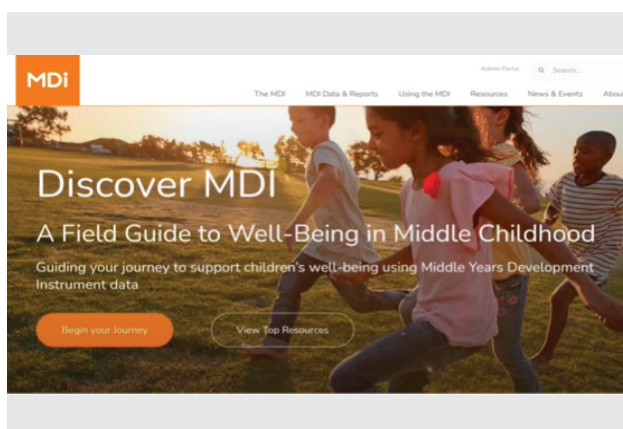
However, Ms. Salima discovered socioeconomic disparities in participation. Specifically, children residing in wealthier areas tend to engage more in paid educational programs. In rural areas, Salima found that children often reported involvement in domestic work and taking care of siblings. She also uncovered gender differences, indicating that boys are more likely to have opportunities to play and explore outside their homes and communities, while girls tend to engage in home-based activities due to safety concerns and prevailing gender norms.

Dr. Eva explained that given these findings, it is crucial to understand how the MDI, a measure that has proven effective in promoting positive youth development in Canada, can be adapted and applied in a different context. Dr. Eva noted that Ms. Salima's work highlights the importance of adapting and potentially decolonising research instruments when used in different cultural contexts. Adapting it for use in different cultural contexts requires consideration of cultural norms and values, as well as acknowledgment of the potential biases and assumptions that may be embedded in the original instrument.

Dr. Eva then, discussed the limitations and challenges faced by Ms. Salima in Pakistan. The key takeaway from the discussion was the need for partnerships

and appropriate tools to measure and collect data on positive well-being, which is currently lacking in Pakistan. While measures in low and middle-income countries focus on reducing child mortality and ending certain illnesses and diseases, Ms. Salima's approach was to have a strengths-based tool that measures positive things to promote. Schools were identified as a good system to reach children, teachers, and stakeholders, and reporting data back to teachers and training them was identified as an effective way to support positive youth development.

An online dashboard is being developed to enable users to interact with their data and analyse it in subgroups. Dr. Eva stressed the importance of focusing on positive relationships and nurturing them in schools and communities. Social and emotional learning is now part of the curriculum in British Columbia, with a specific focus on addressing mental well-being, she said. She presented a snapshot of that curriculum, showing how the different MDI measures map into it. The MDI can be used as a form of assessment for how children are doing in school.



Dr. Eva concluded her presentation by providing her email address and links to the Discover MDI and the HELP website, inviting attendees to reach out to her.

Mr. Badar Uzaman, the Programme Policy Officer, SUN Secretariat, MoPDSI, shared an update on the work being done by the 'Ministry' on the Programme Development for Key Family Care Practices, Budget Allocation, Capacity Building of key stakeholders of ECD, Resource Mobilisation, and ECD Data Collection and Management System.

He shared the timeline of key developments that happened in ECD since 2017 which includes the formation of the ECD task force and a Technical



Working Group (TWG), and the signing of a Letter of Intent (LoI) with UNICEF in 2017. In 2019 with the help of the TWG, the Ministry carried out a stock-taking/mapping exercise of the ongoing work in ECD, conducted Policy Dialogue, developed a comprehensive parental package called the Key Family Care Practices (KFCPs), developed ECD Policy Framework, Standards, and ECD Index Pakistan. From 2020 to 2022, key tasks included the formation of a National Steering Committee (NSC) and National Technical Working Groups (NTWG), the preparation of a feasibility report for ECD, and the onboarding of the provinces and AJK.

Moving ahead he said that from 2022 to 2023, Provincial/Area Steering Committees (SCs) and Technical Working Groups (TWGs) were established, ECD reports and the KFCP Package were disseminated, training and implementation of the KFCP were carried out and deep dive sessions on the KFCPs were conducted, along with optimization of KFCPs and a social media campaign.

Mr. Badar further mentioned that ECD has been integrated into the latest policy documents in 2022-2023, including the Pakistan Outlook 2035, National Development Framework (NDF), Public Accounts Committee (PAC), Annual Plan, 5-year plan, and a 3-year growth strategy. Moving ahead, he shared that a **National Multi-sectoral Nutrition Programme to Reduce Stunting and other forms of Malnutrition** has been approved and been made part of PSDP with ECD as a cross-cutting theme in it.

Concluding his presentation, Mr. Badar emphasised that the formation of various committees, development of policy documents, integration of ECD into national policies, implementation of the KFCP Package, and the introduction of new ECD services demonstrate the Ministry's commitment to advancing early childhood development in the country.

Mr. Guy Le Fanu, Senior Global Technical Lead for Education, Sightsavers UK, expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to present and introduced himself as a staff member of Sightsavers.



He explained that Sightsavers is an international non-governmental organisation based in the UK, with 700 staff working in 33 countries across Africa and South Asia. Sightsavers' mission is to eliminate avoidable blindness and support the empowerment of people with disabilities to learn and participate equally in society. Mr. Guy added that most of their education projects are pan-disability promoting inclusive education of good quality for children with various impairments and conditions.

Mr. Guy proceeded to discuss ***Sightsavers' Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) Project in Malawi***. He provided introductory information about Malawi, which is a country in South-Eastern Africa with a population of just under 20 million. Malawi is one of the most disadvantaged countries in the world, ranked 169 out of 191 in the 2022 Human Development Index, and a significant percentage of children have some sort of disability due to malnutrition, lack of access to healthcare, and other factors.

In Malawi, ECDE takes the form of community-based childhood care centers (CBCCs), which are set up and run either by civil society organisations or by the communities themselves. There are 5,660 CBCCs across the country, serving 400,000 children aged 3 to 6, mostly children living in rural areas. The caregivers or teachers in these CBCCs are generally volunteers, and the CBCCs are run by management committees composed of local people. The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare has formal responsibility for the CBCCs, but their involvement in the running of these CBCCs tends to be minimal.

Mr. Guy explained that the ECDE system in Malawi has several strengths, including a strong sense of ownership and contribution of time and resources by local communities, the possibilities for promoting child-centred, play-based education, and a very low-cost form of provision that is more sustainable and scalable than other models. However, he also shared the weaknesses of this system, such as underfunded CBCCs with limited government investment, dilapidated infrastructure, lack of accessibility for children with disabilities, and caregivers with limited formal education and little or no training in ECDE. These weaknesses make it difficult to provide high-quality, inclusive education, especially for children with disabilities, he said.

Regarding Sightsavers' ECDE project in Malawi, Mr. Guy noted that they have been working in ECDE in Malawi since 2012, developing good relationships with key actors and a sound understanding of ECDE realities in the country. Currently, they are working with 49 ECDE centres in Nceu, a district in the central region, and are working with multiple stakeholders. In 2022, 201 children with disabilities were enrolled in these centres, more than half of them girls, which represents a 139% increase in numbers from the previous year. He explained some of the strategies being implemented by Sightsavers and their local partners to improve early childhood development and education (ECDE) in Malawi. These strategies included the development of information, education and communication materials, the promotion of child-centred learning, imaginative use of resources, the development of integrated services, income generation, and advocacy.

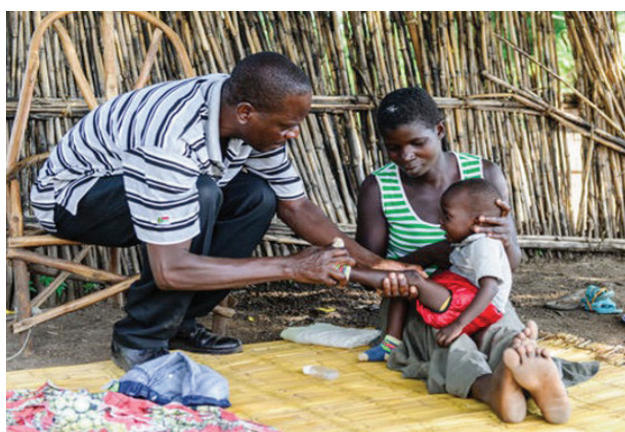
Moving forward, Mr. Guy highlighted the training clip chart developed by Sightsavers in collaboration with caregivers, which focused on different aspects of inclusion, such as child-centered learning, accessible environments and child safeguarding. The methodology used, he said, was highly participatory, with caregivers encouraged to identify their own inclusive strategies, and it allowed each Community Based Childcare Centre (CBCC) to organise its own continuous professional development. Sightsavers worked with CBCCs to identify play-based, developmentally appropriate, and relevant learning activities that focused on specific skill areas. They also helped caregivers identify locally available, low-cost, and no-cost teaching and learning resources, including natural resources, purchased or made resources. Mr. Guy presented a photo of children and their teachers playing a parachute game with a

large, circular, multi-coloured piece of fabric and a ball, which helped to develop teamwork skills and fine and gross motor skills.



Sightsavers, he said also implemented an income generation scheme to support CBCCs, which involved establishing a goat breeding scheme and community gardens to grow maize. Through growing maize, CBCCs were also able to provide daily meals of porridge for all the children, which encouraged parents to send their children to the CBCCs.

To ensure that children with disabilities received joined-up provision, Sightsavers integrated education services with available health and social services. Mr. Guy showed a photo of Dayton, a three-year-old boy with his mother, and Tobias, a health surveillance assistant, who visited the family every two weeks to do exercises with the child. The aim was to prepare Dayton to attend CBCC when he was physically ready.



Mr. Guy highlighted that advocacy was also an important strategy for Sightsavers, particularly advocating with the National Disability and Civil Society Organisation to invest more in ECDE, specifically disability-inclusive ECDE. He emphasised the need for policy frameworks and plans to support greater and targeted investment in ECDE.

Mr. Guy concluded his presentation by expressing his hope that the strategies implemented in Malawi could be relevant to Pakistan's ECDE situation.

Ms. Sehar Taimur Khan, Education Advisor, Save the Children, Pakistan discussed the *Organisation's Common Approaches to Early Childhood Development (ECD) Programmes*.



Ms. Sehar started her presentation by stressing on the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD). A child's earliest years are crucial for their growth and development, with 90% of brain development occurring before their fifth birthday. It has been observed that children who do not receive adequate health, nutrition, protection, care, and stimulation in their early years are more likely to struggle academically and earn less, thus perpetuating a cycle of poverty and inequality. To address this issue, a common approach to ECD has been adopted, which is evidence-based and can be adapted to work in various contexts and replicated in different countries, she said. The approach includes a "Survive breakthrough" aimed at reducing child mortality rates and "Learn" to provide quality education for all children. The "Survive breakthrough" focuses on **Saving Newborn Lives, Nourishing the Youngest (IYCF), and "Integrated Community Case Management of Childhood Illnesses" (iCCM)** for treating sick children in their community. The "Learn" pillar includes "Building Brains" and "Ready to Learn" initiatives to improve access to quality education for all children. By adopting these common approaches to ECD, we can ensure that every child can thrive and reach their full potential.

Ms. Sehar started her presentation by discussing the first approach; **Saving Newborn Lives**, which is aimed at addressing maternal mortality and morbidity before and during pregnancy, providing

care at the time of birth to skilled healthcare workers, ensuring essential newborn care, hygiene practices, thermal care, and breastfeeding, as well as providing postnatal care through home visits when the baby is at home. Special care is also given to newborns with complications, such as kangaroo care.

Ms. Sehar then discussed the second approach that is **Nourishing the Youngest**. It is a comprehensive approach to promote, protect and support adequate Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) to ensure that children have the best chances of surviving, growing and developing to their full potential. She further commented that this approach targets children from their conception to 2 years of age (their first 1,000 days) and their mothers and caregivers. Nourishing the Youngest focuses on the nutrition and health needs of children while acknowledging the broader needs of children and their caregivers to be protected, stimulated and educated and receive quality healthcare in a caring environment, as well as addressing the issue of undernutrition.

She went on the third approach titled **Treating Children Close to Home - Integrated Community Case Management (iCCM)** which is an equity-focused approach to delivering life-saving curative interventions for common childhood illnesses such as malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhoea, particularly in those places with little or no access to facility-based services. She pointed out that the iCCM approach involves identifying and training community health workers to diagnose and treat common childhood illnesses, as well as identifying children in need of immediate referral to a health facility. This also involves advocacy around revisiting national policies and financing around iCCM for families and sick children who lack access to healthcare.

Moving forward, Ms. Sehar discussed the approaches under the “Learn” pillar which encompasses the **Building Brains** approach that is aimed at children from zero to three years of age and is based on play, early communication, and responsive care. It aims to reach every child through any platform, with an emphasis on reaching every child using interventions that are integrated across sectors.

She further stressed on that caregiver sessions seek to change and develop caregiver competencies and behaviours, with a focus on the following three areas:

1. **Stimulating caregiver practices & responsive care are proven to improve child development outcomes**

2. **Even in emergency contexts, programmes display positive effects on mothers’ mental health and children’s cognitive development**
3. **Early stimulation and responsive care can be successfully integrated into existing service delivery platforms**

She further commented that Caregivers are trained to provide a calming and soothing environment for the child, playing games with them, reading books, talking through pictures, and making stories to enhance attachment, bonding, and learning.

Then she discussed the second approach under this pillar i.e. the **Ready to Learn** approach, also known as Emergent Literacy and Emergent Mathematics, is aimed at children under six years of age. Save the Children works with preschools, parents, communities, and governments to prepare children for school and promote learning readiness.

Ms. Sehar highlighted that Ready to Learn focuses on five Emergent Literacy Skills and five Emergent Mathematics Skills

Emergent Literacy Skills:

1. **Talking and listening**
2. **Understanding print**
3. **Knowing what books are**
4. **Knowing about the alphabet**
5. **Understanding sounds and words**

She further identified that Learning in the Centers enhances Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) practices by supporting pre-school teachers to integrate over 100 play-based activities into their daily schedules. Learning at Home extends opportunities to children who have no access to a preschool. This component features 25 simple, hands-on games that caregivers can do at home with their children. To assess the children’s learning levels at different ages, an assessment called IDELA, International Development and Early Learning Assessment, was used.

Ms. Sehar concluded her presentation by commenting that these proven approaches that Save the Children has been using across the globe are contributing to their Nurturing Care Framework. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government introduced the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) model in 401 government schools, leading to the establishment of more than 500 ECD rooms.

To extend the reach of this model, a community-based ECD model was developed, which included the creation of 120 ECCE homes. After successful implementation, the KP government adopted this model for the entire province in 2015. Additionally, an ECD task force was formed, and the government planned to implement the ECE model in all 22,893 schools in the province within five years. She further pointed out that in Balochistan, 100 ECD rooms were constructed, and a literacy pilot programme was initiated in 300 government schools. Moreover, literacy and numeracy were piloted in four provinces through the capacity building of teachers and provision of teaching and learning materials. More than 2,200 schools and accelerated learning centers were covered under the School Health and Nutrition Programme. Health and nutrition messages and lessons were also reviewed and included in early primary grade textbooks in Sindh and Punjab.

Concluding remarks from Plenary Session Chair, Dr. Baseer Achakzai, DG Health, the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination Islamabad

He concluded the session by highlighting the crucial issues of maternal and child health, nutrition, newborn mortality, breastfeeding, and early learning that affect Pakistan's young population. He urged all key stakeholders to join hands for targeted interventions and greater knowledge-sharing to address these issues and improve the overall health and well-being



of all the children in Pakistani. He acknowledged the progress being made in recent years to combat these issues but emphasised that much more needs to be done to ensure that every child in Pakistan has access to quality healthcare, education, and nutrition programme.

He emphasised the role of the government, civil society, academia, and the private sector in creating an enabling environment for children to thrive. He encouraged collaboration across all sectors to develop integrated solutions and programmes that prioritise the needs of children and their families. Moreover, he expressed his gratitude to the organisers of the conference for providing a platform for experts, policymakers, and practitioners to come together, share ideas and experiences, and work together to improve the lives of children in Pakistan.



Concurrent Sessions

Early Learning & Development Opportunities

Presenters

Ms. Romela Zaynab, Iqra University

Ms. Marvi Soomro, Founder, Innovate Educate & Inspire (IEI)

Ms. Uzma Hussain, M.Phil. Scholar, AKU-IED

Dr. Muhammad Samiullah, ECE & E TED, Allama Iqbal Open University

Ms. Salma Abdul Qayyum, Student, Allama Iqbal Open University

Mr. Arshad Mehmood Qamar, Allama Iqbal Open University

Prof. Dr Fazal ur Rahman and Dr Rahmat Ullah Bhatti, Faculty of Education, Allama Iqbal Open University

Ms. Alia Bibi, Allama Iqbal Open University



The concurrent session on ‘Early Learning & Development Opportunities’ was focused on ensuring quality early childhood development services, professional development of ECD teachers, promoting playful and positive parenting, the impact of play-based learning, the new dynamics of online teaching, the role of home, school, and communities in early childhood development, and urbanisation. During the session, the speakers discussed the strategies to develop the ECD workforce, innovative pedagogical practices for professional development of ECD teachers, and the impact of play-based learning on child development. They also talked about the role of parents, schools, and communities in promoting early childhood development and the challenges posed by urbanisation. Additionally, the session highlighted the new dynamics of online teaching, including the use of Ed-Tech and its impact on young children. Overall, the session provided insights into the various opportunities and challenges related to early childhood development in the region.

The concurrent session was jointly chaired by Dr. Fauzia Khan, Chief Advisor School Education & Literacy Department, Government of Sindh, Dr Sughra Chaudhry Khan, Education & ECD Specialist, AKF,P, Dr Shahzad Mithani, Child Protection and Education Policy Expert, Dr Batool Atta Assistant Prof, University of AJ&K, and Prof. Dr Tanzela Nabeel, AIOU.

Session I

The first presenter, **Ms. Romela Zaynab** presented on the ***'The Lens Behind the Semblance of Parents: Sifting Parental Involvement from the Formation Years of Juveniles Care and Education'***.



Ms. Zaynab emphasised the significance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) as the foundation for later health and well-being, highlighting that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognise its importance. By 2030, the aim is for every child to receive adequate care, education, and learning opportunities, particularly in pre-primary education, which serves as a stepping stone to primary education. Ms. Zaynab underscored the vital role that schools play in a child's education and overall development. Moreover, she highlighted the increasing recognition of parents as the primary educators for their children and the literature's support for parental involvement in ECD and care policies. Research has demonstrated that parental involvement positively impacts a child's academic success and overall personality development, making it crucial to involve parents in academic matters and the nurturing of their child's character. This involvement is particularly influential in helping children with special abilities or mental illnesses adapt to society.

Ms. Zaynab highlighted that parental involvement in ECD and care policies has become an important topic of interest in the community. However, the concept of parental involvement encompasses various interconnected keywords, including parental participation, collaboration, and engagement. There is a need to understand how parents perceive their level of involvement in their child's education and to what extent schools actively incorporate parents into their child's educational journey. To address this gap, Ms. Zaynab's research aimed to analyse the degree of parental involvement and the extent to which schools include parents in educational

matters concerning their children. The research questions focused on examining the level of parents' involvement in their children's education and the extent to which educational institutions integrate parents into their decision-making processes.

To collect data for her research, Ms. Zaynab conducted content analysis, reviewing numerous articles related to parental involvement, parental engagement, childhood, and academic success. From the selected articles, 110 papers specifically related to early childhood development and parental involvement were subjected to thematic analysis using NVivo software. The findings revealed that parents' participation in school activities is closely linked to parental and school involvement, encompassing various aspects such as school-based, home-based, and home-school relationships. Ms. Zaynab underscored the importance of instilling a sense of partnership between schools and parents and highlighted the need for schools to adopt an open-door policy that facilitates regular meetings between parents and teachers. Such measures are crucial for bridging the communication gap and fostering effective collaboration between parents and schools.

The second presenter, **Ms. Marvi Soomro**, presented a pilot study on ***'Continuous Teacher Professional Development for Early Educators using a WhatsApp model called SEED (Support for Early Educators)'***.



IEI is a non-profit organisation registered with SECP that has been working with remote mountain communities in the Upper Hunza region since 2016 in a partnership model with communities and in agreement with the local district education department. Ms. Marvi is an education practitioner with 7 years of experience working in remote communities in GB and is also a curriculum

consultant for AKF-MTG and Learning Equality: English Language Curriculum Mapping Ghana.

Ms. Marvi discussed the challenges to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in remote mountain valleys in GB, which included public schools and ECD challenges, teacher capacity, and parent awareness. She highlighted the need to increase support for teachers to lead quality and relevant early childhood development. She emphasised the need to investigate the role of offline and continuous professional development of teachers in improving the quality of education in the early years, and the value of video-based resources for teacher professional development, which was what her study was about.

She presented the methodology of the pilot study that involved gaining insights from the work supporting ECD classrooms in Chipursan and Shimshal valleys since 2019, developing a theme-based curriculum, weekly lesson plans, and video-based training materials for teachers' professional development, active teacher communication through WhatsApp group to test resources, and frequent teacher feedback, quarterly feedback from school leaders and parents. The pilot implementation model involved training of 10 teachers in 5 different remote mountain villages in the Upper Hunza in Gilgit Baltistan using a WhatsApp-based distance teacher training model. Ms. Marvi further discussed the SEED module that included a theme-based curriculum with weekly lesson plans and supporting resources, a video-based training module, and development milestones relevant to children ages 3-5. The video-based training module consisted of 7 videos that covered topics such as the importance of daily routine, circle time, play in early years' centers, story time, teaching language to early years, and theme-based curriculum. She further added that each video in the training pack was developed using principles of learning experience design while considering the contextual needs of early educators in low-resource contexts. Talking about the use of training materials, Ms. Marvi said that the videos in Urdu language were with tips and strategies to support building teachers' conceptual understanding of early education approaches, relevant key concepts were also displayed on the screen in English, illustrations used, and simple text to support teachers' acquisition of knowledge were used, and information segmented to provide bite-sized content knowledge to make it easy for the teachers to consume the training content was followed. The duration of videos ranged between

2:00 to 4:00 minutes to minimise the cognitive load. She then shared the findings of the pilot study that showed that the videos were helping the teachers to improve their classroom engagement, tips about organising materials and centers were giving them ideas to make the most of their low-resource scenarios, and simple small tips were helping them run their classrooms more effectively. She further commented that teachers reported that they were now more actively incorporating story time in their teaching because they know it supports the development of language, imagination and creativity. She further underscored that the quality of ECD services in the targeted schools has improved greatly since SEED was launched, as children are now more eager to go to school regularly. She shared that teachers are now trying to create holistic learning environment rather than focusing mainly on developing literacy and numeracy skills.

Dr. Muhammad Samiullah, the fourth presenter shared the importance of his research, which aimed to investigate the **'Effects of the Communicative Approach (CA) on Paragraph Writing Skills in English at the Primary Level.**



Highlighting the problem statement, he said that many teachers still rely on traditional teaching methods and do not integrate communicative activities in their classrooms.

Dr. Samiullah highlighted the research objectives, which were to determine the impact of the CA on paragraph writing improvement in terms of vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, and fluency. He said that the research hypotheses included both null and alternative hypotheses, providing a comprehensive framework for the study. To conduct the research, he explained that a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test non-equivalent control group design was used, and convenience sampling was

employed to select the participants. He highlighted that the experimental group, which was exposed to the CA approach, exhibited substantial gains in all five components (grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, fluency, and form) of paragraph writing skills. On the other hand, he emphasised that the control group, which underwent traditional teaching methods, showed no significant improvement in their paragraph writing skills. Dr. Samiullah further elaborated on the findings by reporting the effect size, t-value, and significance level for each component and group.

Importantly, he underscored that the results of the study rejected all null hypotheses and supported the alternative hypotheses, indicating that the CA approach had a significant effect on paragraph writing skills. He specifically highlighted that the CA approach contributed to the development of vocabulary, mechanics, grammar, fluency, and form in writing. Dr. Samiullah emphasised the practical implications of the findings, suggesting that incorporating communicative approaches in the classroom can significantly enhance the writing skills of primary level students in English.

Concluding remarks from the Session Chair, Dr. Sughra Chaudhry Khan, Education and Early Years Expert, Aga Khan Foundation, Pakistan



Dr. Sughra Chaudhry Khan began by reiterating the importance of having a focused research question. She emphasised the need for researchers to have one primary research question and then use three to five supporting questions to back it up. Addressing and answering the primary research question thoroughly is the key in any research, she said. Giving remarks on the first presentation, Dr. Sughra said that though parents have a pivotal role in their child's education, they often feel that they have no place in schools. In some cases, parents are not even allowed on school premises, she said. She urged schools to reach out

to parents and encourage them to participate in their child's education as this is one of key responsibilities of schools.

Commenting on the second presentation she said that she was excited to hear that environment is as important as academic instruction. However, she added that it is not only the physical environment that matters in children's learning but other aspects such as the role of the teacher as a facilitator to create and use that exciting and welcoming environment in the classrooms, especially for early years is essential. Teachers, she said need to understand their role as facilitators for children's learning so they must play an active role by adopting facilitative roles, using innovative ways of teaching. Dr. Sughra appreciated the efforts of Ms. Marvi to use video-based training methodology for teachers, calling it a wonderful innovation. She also stressed on the use of media for educating teachers and parents about new ways of teaching and learning.

Session II

Ms. Salma Abdul Qayyum emphasised the significance of her presentation on *'the view of Preschool Teachers about Creating a Learning Environment in Classrooms'*.



She started her presentation by highlighting that the time spent in preschool is crucial for the holistic development of children, therefore, an age-appropriate learning environment is essential to meet their diverse learning needs. She talked about the importance of the physical environment, including space, furniture, and learning materials, in supporting effective child development. She suggested that establishing learning centers within the classroom provides hands-on activities that cater to a child's learning needs. Moreover, she emphasised the crucial role of teachers in creating an interactive learning environment for their students.

Moving ahead, she shared the aim of her study which was to seek the opinions of preschool teachers regarding the creation of an interactive learning environment and how it facilitates children's learning. For her study, Ms. Salma employed a qualitative research design to explore the viewpoints of preschool teachers. Ten preschool teachers from different schools in Rawalpindi and Islamabad participated in the study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, using six open-ended questions that focused on designing an intellectually stimulating learning environment in preschool classrooms. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the collected data, and the findings were presented in a table format.

Key responses of the teachers included support for the use of diverse learning materials that promote all developmental domains, with play being identified as a crucial activity for children's learning experiences in the classroom. They also stressed the importance of a safe, clean, bright, and spacious learning environment that allows children to move freely. Additionally, the teachers recommended age-appropriate learning centers equipped with various materials to facilitate children's exploration and active engagement in their learning. The learning centers were seen as spaces where children could make choices and develop their social and emotional skills.

Ms. Hussun Bibi, MPhil Programme Student from AKU IED conducted her research on ***Active Learning in ECED Classroom: A Case Study from Community Center in Karachi, Pakistan.*** She emphasised the importance of early childhood development and highlighted active learning as an approach that engages children in their own learning process. The study involved two ECED-trained teachers as participants, and data was collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings showed that the teachers had a good understanding of ECED and viewed active learning as a high-scope teaching approach that encourages discovery and hands-on engagement. They created a stimulating classroom environment and used various materials to facilitate active learning. However, there was a lack of dedicated learning areas due to limited space. The teachers implemented need-based practices but expressed concerns about the negative consequences of play on student engagement in learning. Based on the findings, Ms. Hussun recommended enhancing the conceptual understanding of active learning, providing support for dedicated learning areas,

introducing play as a teaching pedagogy, and conducting further research in similar contexts.

Concluding remarks from the Chair, Dr. Shahzad Mithani, Education Policy and Child Rights Expert



The session chair, Dr. Shahzad Mithani, expressed his fascination with interesting research topics and highlighted his admirable enthusiasm towards research. He believed that with the level of passion exhibited, a better set of research projects could be achieved. While acknowledging that his comments may not be applicable to all research endeavors, he emphasized the importance of upfront assumptions and the need to evaluate the assumptions made during the research process. Dr. Shahzad suggested that a more comprehensive analysis and thorough literature review could enhance the research approach. He noted that literature can either validate or challenge assumptions and emphasized the significance of conducting literature reviews based on their intrinsic value, even if they do not directly support the research question.

Dr. Shahzad observed that the field of early childhood development (ECD) in Pakistan and the region has made significant progress over the years. He highlighted the shift from focusing solely on environmental factors to exploring cognitive dexterity, flexibility in cognition, and inhibitory controls among young children. The research aimed to understand behaviors such as tantrums, anger, and frustration, identify triggers behind these behaviors, and create an environment that fosters flexible brain function and strong working memory in children.

While acknowledging the valuable work being done, Dr. Shahzad urged the audience to push further and address the broader needs of Pakistani society. He stressed that literature reviews should guide researchers by providing insights into previous work

and identifying areas that require further exploration. He encouraged a constant questioning approach throughout the research design process, prompting researchers to ask “what if?” at every step. The goal, according to Dr. Shahzad, is to contribute to the scholarship of research and generate new knowledge. If researchers are successful in this endeavor, they should celebrate their achievements. However, if they find that their research falls short of making meaningful contributions, Dr. Shahzad advised returning to the drawing board and formulating a different research question.

Session III

Mr. Arshad Mehmood Qamar, the first presenter, highlighted his study *comparing the cognitive development of urban and rural school children at the preoperational stage*.



His study focused on examining the disparities between the two groups in terms of language development, egocentrism, understanding of the environment, locus of control, conservation, and building with blocks. To conduct the study, Mr. Arshad selected 25 students from ten schools, with five students each from urban-II and rural areas of Nilore sector.

Utilising a descriptive research design, the study employed observations and structured interviews as the primary methods for data collection. The findings indicated that urban school children displayed superior language development compared to their rural counterparts. Additionally, urban students demonstrated greater proficiency in understanding the environment, conservation, and building with blocks. On the contrary, rural school children exhibited higher levels of egocentrism and limited awareness of the urban environment.

Based on the study's outcomes, Mr. Arshad emphasised that children attending urban schools

exhibited more advanced cognitive development than those in rural areas. He recommended the provision of enhanced facilities and expert teachers to promote better cognitive development among students in rural regions. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify the various levels of cognitive development among children and the contributing factors responsible for the observed discrepancies. Mr. Arshad shared that the study drew upon a literature review to establish cognitive development constructs, including language development, egocentrism, understanding the environment, locus of control, conservation, coloring, and building with blocks. The research questions addressed the cognitive development status of children aged 4-5 years in urban and rural areas, the disparities between urban and rural students regarding cognitive development, and the factors contributing to these differences.

The findings of his study emphasised the superior cognitive development exhibited by urban school children compared to their rural counterparts. To improve cognitive development in rural areas, Mr. Arshad recommended the provision of more facilities and expert teachers.

Dr. Rahmat Ullah Bhatti and Prof. Dr. Fazal ur Rahman conducted a *'Survey on Early Childhood Development and Pedagogical Skills for ECE Work,'* highlighting the significant demand for Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) in Pakistan.



The survey revealed that the country lacks an adequate number of ECED centers or schools. Furthermore, the existing facilities are understaffed by untrained individuals and lack sufficient resources. Shockingly, the survey found that 63% of children aged 3-5 years in Pakistan do not receive any education related to early childhood development. Moreover, majority of early years intervention, approximately 70%, is provided by low-cost private sector institutions.

To address this pressing issue, Dr. Bhatti emphasised the initiation of the ECED project. The project encompassed various activities, including a need analysis survey, visits to low-cost schools to assess training needs and required facilities for ECED, recording field voices, module development, conducting training workshops for ECE teachers and principals (spanning 25 days), provision of Taleemi bags/ECE KIT to low-cost schools, and an ECE seminar.

Dr. Rahmat highlighted that the survey focused on gathering insights from ECE teachers, managers, and entrepreneurs working in low-cost schools. Through purposive sampling techniques, a sample size of 100 ECE teachers and 14 managers/principals were selected from the population. The researchers utilized a need analysis survey, incorporating survey questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and observation checklists as data collection tools. He further pointed out that the survey aimed to gather information about the respondents' knowledge of ECE curriculum, teaching strategies, nutrition, health & hygiene, child rights, safety & protection, community and family involvement, early literacy, language learning, reading, writing, and numeracy. It also aimed to assess the respondents' understanding of a child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development, room arrangement for a preschool classroom, and ECED facilities in low-cost schools.

Dr. Rahmat explained the findings of the survey that underscored that majority of the ECE teachers were female and held bachelor's degrees, but they did not have any professional degree or diploma in ECE. While the teachers employed various techniques to promote children's learning, such as incorporating new and interesting words and utilizing rhythm sticks for syllable segmentation in children's names, however, there was a clear need for further training. The teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to reading and re-reading rhyming books to children and engaging them in reading exercises. They facilitated conversations among children about their favorite books, encouraged questioning and discussion during activities, and employed audiovisual aids for language development. Gross-motor skill activities were supervised, and fine-motor skills were promoted using puzzles, pegs, snaps, buttons, and clay.

He further highlighted that the teachers also emphasized the importance of hygiene habits such as regular handwashing, tooth-brushing, and bathing, while reinforcing nutritious food choices through activities involving food play and cooking. Numeracy

skills were taught using various activities, including tracing numbers in sand, and forming numbers with clay. The teachers utilized numeral cards, number puzzles, unit blocks, inch cubes, ruler, and balance scales, and counting books for Mathematics related activities. They relied on observation to assess children's progress and maintained comprehensive progress records for ongoing assessment. Regular feedback on children's progress was provided to parents.

Based on the survey's recommendations, Dr. Rahmat suggested equipping ECE teachers and workers with the required knowledge, skills, and disposition for early years education. A module was developed for hands-on training of ECE teachers and workers, aligning with the findings of the need assessment survey. Following the survey results training workshops spanning over 25 days were conducted at the main campus of AIOU, for early year teachers and managers. Additionally, 10 selected low-cost schools received were provided with Taleemi bags/kits containing ECE resources. A seminar was also conducted to share the project's findings and results with stakeholders, featuring presentations from ECE experts covering various aspects of ECED.

The expert group involved in the project recommended the sponsorship of more projects focused on ECE and the development of a separate policy dedicated to early childhood education. Dr. Rahmat also recommended to introduce pre-service training programmes and adopt a multi-sectoral and holistic approach to cater to the needs of ECED.

Concluding remarks from the chair, Dr Batool Atta Assistant Prof, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir



Dr. Batool Atta concluded the session commending the efforts of the conference organisers for organising such an engaging conference, acknowledging the

attendees for their participation, and appreciating the presenters for their hard work to generate indigenous knowledge on ECD through conducting research studies. Sharing her reflection about her first encounter with Ms. Khadija Khan back in 2016, where she struggled to find examples of good practices and academic perspectives in early childhood education in Pakistan. Today after seven years, there has been a significant increase in knowledge, discussion, and awareness in this area, which was evident in the presentations during the conference, she said.

Dr. Batool appreciated all the presenters for their contributions and highlighted the innovative approaches being shared by some presenters for promoting early years learning. She suggested that innovative practices should be part of teachers' ongoing professional development rather than making them part of some interventions as they are necessary to challenge the traditional way of teaching and learning. She also urged the researchers to focus on early years assessment and evaluation as this is often neglected and misunderstood in Pakistan even in the elite private schools. Research in this area could provide evidence to practitioners and schools looking to improve their evaluation practices for preschoolers, she said.

Session IV

Ms. Alia Bibi, presented a '**Study on the Experiences of Parents Regarding Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Primary Schools**'.



She started her presentation by discussing that early childhood education is focused on providing a strong foundation for future learning and success and is crucial for social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of children from birth to age 8. Ms. Alia explained that providing high-quality early childhood education is essential as it has been proven to have a significant impact on long-term outcomes such as

academic achievement, socialisation, and economic success. Parents play an essential role in early childhood education as a supportive environment provided at home is essential for a child's early development.

Moving forward, she shared the aim her study which was to explore the experiences of parents about ECE in primary schools, identify problems that parents face in continuing ECE for children, and explore parents' suggestions related to school to improve ECE. The study was conducted using a descriptive design and collected qualitative data through interviews with 12 parents of students admitted to ECE in primary schools.

Ms. Alia explained the findings which highlighted that 80% of parents were satisfied with the provisions of physical resources in ECE classrooms, while approximately 20% expressed the need for audio-visual aids like LCDs to enhance their children's learning experience. Most parents (75%) were satisfied with the learning activities in ECE classrooms, while 15% of parents expressed concerns about the teachers' behaviour. About 90% of parents appreciated the monthly meetings held by teachers to discuss their child's behaviour, attitude, and skills, while 10% expressed concerns about the teaching methodology and affordability of relevant materials.

She concluded her presentation by recommending that all school should offer free of cost ECE services as fulfilling the requirements of ECE is not possible for majority parents in Pakistan. Moreover, she said that the ECE facilities should be equipped with adequate resources including teaching and learning & play materials, trained teachers and space for children to play and move around freely.

Concluding remarks from the Chair, Prof. Dr Tanzila Nabeel from AIU

The session chair, Dr. Tanzila Nabeel, found the



sessions of the conference to be highly interesting, with intriguing papers being presented. As a result, several questions and suggestions emerged in her mind, which she intended to share as recommendations for incorporation into teacher training programs.

Dr. Tanzila's first suggestion revolved around the inclusion of parental involvement and determining its extent. She emphasised the importance of considering the level of parental engagement, particularly regarding the utilisation of the school's work plan by students and how parents can actively participate.

Dr. Tanzila recognised that discrepancies often arise in both the classroom and home environments due to different approaches and the varying levels of attention given to children. Thus, she stressed the significance of incorporating parental involvement and raising awareness about it in teacher training programmes and courses on school environments. She believed that these aspects would contribute to bridging the gaps and creating a harmonious educational experience for students. Additionally, she mentioned another suggestion, which may have been discussed in a separate session, focusing on the coordination of safety and security measures in schools, homes, and broader societal areas. Dr. Tanzila emphasised the need for teacher training programmes to address this critical aspect.

Furthermore, Dr. Tanzila mentioned that there were other teams and topics discussed during the conference and hopefully, the deliberations will be shared with the attendees on which the teacher training institutes and centers will work for further research and implementation.

Address by Dr. Fauzia Khan, Chief Advisor School Education & Literacy Department, Government of Sindh

Addressing the audience, Dr. Fauzia Khan recognised the commitment of conference organisers for providing forums to key ECD stakeholders through organising such conferences annually. She also congratulated the paper presenters for contributing towards the cause of ECD. She said that the two-day conference focused on the importance of early childhood education and development (ECED), including its benefits and psychological impact on families and communities, and much more. Now it is the responsibility of policymakers to recognise the strong research evidence supporting the effectiveness of ECED in promoting retention rates, especially in the face of the challenge of student dropouts, and act timely, she added.



She also shared some of the work done in Sindh province in this regard, including the approval of ECE policy in 2015, the development of ECE curriculum standards, and the introduction of a separate ECE teacher cadre of more than 700 ECE teachers and more than 6000 ECE classrooms in 2019, training over 3000 primary teachers as ECE teachers in collaboration with AKU IED and creating separate CPD model for ECE and the establishment of ECE resource centers in elementary colleges and the provincial institute of teacher education.

She highlighted their collaboration with the World Bank to pilot an early stimulation model in two districts, involving lady health workers and a separate curriculum developed for them. Dr. Fauzia emphasised the alignment of ECED initiatives with SDG 4, as Sindh regularly reports on its progress in the SDG 4 report card. She advocated for a multi-sectoral approach, emphasising the need for collaboration between the health, social protection, social welfare, and education departments for the successful implementation of the ECED model.

Dr. Fauzia emphasised the involvement of parents and the community in ECED. She mentioned that their EC policy includes clear chapters on engaging parents and the community, highlighting the importance of establishing classrooms only after actively involving them. Mothers' support groups were identified as a significant feature of their programme, with each ECED teacher mandated to form and engage with such groups.

Overall, Dr. Fauzia conveyed the progress, initiatives, and collaborative efforts undertaken by the School Education and Literacy Department, Government of Sindh, in promoting ECED and acknowledged the crucial role of parents and the community in its successful implementation.

Poster Presentations

The Poster Presentation took place in the Corridor and Lobby on the 1st floor of the Academic Complex. The session was coordinated by Dr. Azhar Mumtaz Saddi from AIOU and Mr. Arshad Mehmood Qamar. Attendees had the opportunity to view and discuss various posters on display during this session.

Mr Razzaq Ahmad presented on the topic of “**Professional Development of ECD Teachers: Problem-Solving Teaching Method’s Effect on Improvement of HOTS of ECD Teachers in Mathematics**”. The study included 75 ECD teachers from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Elementary and Secondary Education, District Mardan, selected through proportionate random sampling.

The study utilised pre-test and post-test data analysis, along with statistical tools such as Levene test, ANOVA, post-hoc analysis, mean, and standard deviations. The findings revealed that the Problem-Solving Teaching Method was a successful strategy for teaching Mathematics at the primary level, surpassing the conventional teaching method. Moreover, the Problem-Solving Teaching Method had a significant impact on the sub-levels of the conceptual dimension, namely analysis, creation, and evaluation, based on the Revised Bloom Taxonomy. The study showed a mean difference of 5.18 for evaluation, 5.75 for analysis, and 7.32 for creation. These results were consistent with previous studies highlighting the correlation between weak problem-solving abilities and poor performance in Mathematics.

Based on the study’s outcomes, it was concluded that the Problem-Solving Teaching Method outperformed the Conventional Teaching Method and could be implemented in Mathematics classrooms. Lesson plans could be designed using the Revised Bloom Taxonomy, and the problem-solving approach could be employed systematically to enhance Higher Order Thinking Skills in Mathematics learning.

Ms. Tehmina Ibad, Dr. Hafiz Tahir Jameel, and Ms. Sobia Pervaiz conducted a *Study on the Importance of Father’s Involvement in Early Intervention for Deaf Children*. The research aimed to assess fathers’ participation in early intervention programmes, their involvement in daily care, and the relationship between their involvement, self-efficacy, and perception of the child’s progress. A survey was administered among 100 fathers of deaf children receiving early intervention services. The results showed moderate father participation in early intervention programmes and relatively high participation in daily care. The study found a significant correlation between the father’s involvement, self-efficacy, and their perception of the child’s progress. Fathers who were more involved had a higher perception of their child’s progress, which increased their self-efficacy.

The findings underscored the importance of the father’s involvement in early intervention for deaf children. Fathers should be recognised as essential members of the intervention team, and their contributions should be valued. The study emphasises that fathers’ active engagement in their child’s education and daily care positively influences their perception of the child’s progress and enhances their self-efficacy. These findings have practical implications for interventions and highlight the significance of the father’s involvement in the intervention process for deaf children and their families.

Ms. Iffat Nawaz Durrani, Ms. Hina Noor, and Ms. Shamaila Hamid Mahmud presented their poster on the '**Effectiveness of Self-Regulation Training Plan for the Treatment of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**'. ADHD, a developmental disorder, affects 9% of children and 5% of adults, with a higher prevalence in boys. Individuals with ADHD face challenges such as hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention, which can lead to issues like poor relationships and academic underachievement. Self-management procedures have shown success in improving classroom behavior, making self-control and self-regulation techniques crucial in ADHD intervention plans. In Pakistan, there is limited research on ADHD, and demographic data for institutional-based and self-regulation-based studies is lacking, highlighting the need for further studies on ADHD in the country.

The study utilised a quasi-experimental research design with a pre-test post-test design. The population included ADHD patients diagnosed by mental health professionals in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The sample consisted of ADHD patients aged 15 to 24 years, undergoing training at private clinics, and meeting specific criteria, selected through random sampling. The research instrument used was the Vanderbilt ADHD Parent Rating Scale (VADRS), which assesses various aspects of ADHD symptoms. The training plan consisted of three core modules, each divided into multiple sessions, designed based on discussions with local experts and incorporating the four basic elements of self-regulation theory.

The results of the study indicated a decrease in the mean scores, reflecting improvement in symptoms due to the intervention. However, there was variability in the data, as indicated by the range and standard deviation. The paired sample t-test demonstrated a statistically significant difference ($p=0.005$) in the pre-test and post-test symptoms, indicating a significant improvement in ADHD symptoms as a result of the self-regulation training.

Ms. Shagufta Ibad presented on the '**Factors Affecting Teacher Retention and Turnover at ECE Level in Private Schools**'. The presentation began with a clear introduction defining teacher retention and teacher turnover. Teacher retention refers to the proportion of teachers who remain teaching in the same school for the following year, while teacher turnover refers to the rate at which teachers exit schools, including teacher migration and teacher attrition. The research question was stated as, "What are the most common and least common factors, causes, and solutions for teacher retention and turnover in early childhood education?" The study involved both quantitative and qualitative methods, which provided detailed and comprehensive data for interpretation.

The presenter then discussed the various factors that contribute to teacher retention and turnover in private schools which included the school environment, socioeconomic status, and teacher salaries. The conclusion of the poster emphasised the importance of addressing the factors that affect teacher retention and turnover in private schools. By doing so, it could lead to improvements in the quality of education provided to young children.

Workshop

Workshop II: Impact of Play-based Learning on Child Development

Workshop I: Impact of Play-based Learning on Child Development

The theme of the workshop was the **'Positive Impact of Play-based Learning on the Overall Development of Children'**. The workshop explored how play-based learning can enhance children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development, and how it can be effectively implemented in early childhood education. The workshop also discussed the role of teachers and parents in facilitating play-based learning and promoting children's learning through play. The workshop was conducted by **Ms. Lala Rukh from Right to Play and Dr Haji Parveen, General Manager, Design and Strategy at Human Development Foundation** chaired the session.

The workshop began by discussing what parents want for their children, which included being fit and healthy, excited to learn new things, confident, friendly, expressive, and curious about the world around them. Child development was then defined as the way a child grows, changes, and develops skills, including physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and communicative skills. The stages of child development were also discussed, which include newborn, infant, toddler, preschool age, and school age. It was noted that at each of these stages, children reach different milestones.

The five aspects of child development were then described, which included cognition, social interaction, emotional regulation, speech and language, physical skills, and sensory awareness. The workshop then moved on to discuss what play is and its definition as a fun and enjoyable form of active engagement that is free of constraints, voluntary, and meaningful to the player.

The concept of play-based learning (PBL) was introduced, which was defined as learning while playing. PBL was noted to incorporate many of the same fundamental features of play, such as fun, actively engaging, and meaningful, but with the purposeful inclusion of learning outcomes that differentiate it from play. Different approaches to play-based learning were then discussed, including freely chosen by the child, little direct adult involvement or interaction, and spontaneous, as well as initiated by the child or adult, with adults joining in to extend learning through questioning and demonstrating, organised and directed a play by an adult that may include instructions was also mentioned.

Different types of play were then described, including physical play that builds on gross motor skills, social play that involves interaction with peers, constructive play that includes building things and art, and fantasy play or role-play that encourages imagination.

During the session, participants were engaged in a play activity and discussed the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and sensory skills that were practiced and demonstrated during the game. The impact of play-based learning on child development was then discussed, including physical, social and emotional, cognitive, language and communication, and sensory awareness development.

Lastly, the concept of holistic child development was introduced, where play-based learning provides opportunities for meaningful experiences that result in holistic child development. Overall, the workshop aimed to recognise the impact of play-based learning on child development and the importance of including it in children's education.

Panel Discussion

Panel Discussion I: Role of AIOU in Early Childhood Development

Panel Discussion I: Role of AIOU in Early Childhood Development

The topic of the panel discussion was **“Role of AIOU in Early Childhood Development”**. The session was chaired by **Dr. Fazal ur Rehman from AIOU** and moderated by **Dr. Mubeshra Tufail, also from AIOU**. The panelists included **Dr. Rehmatullah Bhatti, Dr. Nasir Hussain Shah, and Dr. Rukhsana Durrani**, all from AIOU. They shared their knowledge and experiences on how AIOU can play a vital role in early childhood development through various programmes and initiatives. The session provided insights into the importance of early childhood education and how AIOU can contribute to the development of the future generation.



Dr. Rehmatullah emphasised the need for a holistic approach to early childhood development, which considers the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and linguistic aspects of a child’s growth. He also highlighted the role of AIOU in providing training and support to parents, caregivers, and early childhood educators to promote optimal developmental outcomes. Dr. Nasir Hussain Shah discussed the importance of play-based learning in early childhood education and the various strategies employed by AIOU to incorporate it into their programmes. He also highlighted the use of technology in early childhood education, citing AIOU’s use of interactive and multimedia tools to engage young learners. Dr. Rukhsana stressed the need for greater investment in early childhood development and the importance of collaboration between government, civil society, and the private sector to achieve optimal outcomes.

young children. The panelists emphasised the need for a collaborative and holistic approach that prioritises the well-being and development of young children.



Overall, the panel discussion provided valuable insights into the role of AIOU in early childhood development and the challenges and opportunities associated with promoting optimal outcomes for

Closing Session

The closing session of the Conference was concluded by Mr. Aamir Ashraf Khawaja, Federal Secretary Education, and Professional Training and Dr. Innousa Kabore Deputy Country Representative UNICEF. The session was initiated with the recitation and translation of a verse from the Holy Quran, by Mr. Ibtisam Ur Rehman, AIOU. The formal session started with the welcome address by Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Vice Chancellor AIOU. Reflection on the conference was shared Mr. Muhammad Rafique Tahir, Sr. Advisor, AIOU. Dr.Saba Shuja, Manager ECD, UNICEF & Mr. Badar Uzaman, Programme Policy Officer, MoPDSI shared conference findings, recommendations, and way forward.

After the recitation and National Anthem, **Dr. Nasir Mahmood, Vice Chancellor of Allama Iqbal University** thanked all the conference partners, organisers, speakers, and participants. He highlighted that the conference reiterated the five key components of the **Nurturing Care Framework** for early childhood development: health and nutrition, safety, social welfare, education, and access. To improve early childhood development, Pakistan needs to invest in teacher training programmes, develop age-appropriate curricula, provide access to quality early childhood education centers with trained staff, and improve the relationship between parents/ caregivers and education centers.



Dr. Nasir emphasised the low enrollment rate of children aged 36 to 59 months in early childhood education centers in Pakistan. He noted that regional countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan have higher enrollment rates despite being economically like Pakistan. The policymakers in Pakistan need to recognise this issue.



Furthermore, he stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of utilising technology in education. He also emphasised that the cooperation and support of the Ministry of Education is crucial for improving early childhood development in Pakistan.

Dr. Nasir concluded by expressing hope that the recommendations and key takeaways from the conference will be implemented to improve the state of early childhood development in Pakistan.

Mr. Aamir Ashraf Khawaja's Federal Secretary Education, and Professional Training – was the chief guest at the closing ceremony of the conference. He highlighted several important points related to early childhood development (ECD) and its holistic approach. He emphasised that ECD is not limited to education alone but encompasses various domains, including health, nutrition, and child protection. Mr. Khawaja's address acknowledged that every child has the right to access resources necessary for their development and that this requires a collective effort from parents, caregivers, and communities.



Furthermore, he urged policymakers, educators, and practitioners to prioritise ECD and allocate resources to support its promotion. This would include creating opportunities for all children to develop their full potential, regardless of their social, economic, or cultural background. By doing so, we can ensure that every child has a fair chance to reach their full potential.

Mr. Aamir also praised the organisers of the conference for providing a platform to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and explore innovative solutions to promote ECD. The conference allowed researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to discuss and share their experiences, ideas, and research findings related to ECD. It also enabled participants to learn from each other and identify gaps and opportunities for future research and interventions.

In conclusion, Mr. Aamir's speech emphasised the importance of a holistic approach to ECD that includes health, nutrition, education, and child protection. He called for collective efforts from all stakeholders, including parents, caregivers, communities, policymakers, educators, and practitioners, to prioritise ECD and provide opportunities for all children to develop their full potential. Finally, he commended the organisers of the conference for creating a platform for knowledge exchange, sharing best practices, and exploring innovative solutions to promote ECD.

Dr. Innouso Kabore Deputy Country Representative UNICEF shared remarks at the conference that shed light on UNICEF's approach to addressing the needs of children across the world.



He highlighted that UNICEF's approach is inclusive, which means that the organisation aims to reach all children wherever they are, regardless of their

background or circumstances, and provide them with the necessary services to help them thrive. This approach is particularly important in emergencies, where UNICEF prepares to respond quickly by establishing temporary learning centers and safe places for children to play and interact during crises. Moreover, Dr. Innouso emphasised that UNICEF recognises the importance of early childhood development and takes an integrated approach to address it. This approach includes components related to health, nutrition, and protection, which all play a critical role in a child's development. He also stressed the need for coordination across all sectors to make a difference in ECD and create lasting change.

Furthermore, Dr. Innouso mentioned that UNICEF's new country strategy will identify deprived districts and integrate all ECD elements to make a difference. This approach highlights the importance of community-level engagement, which is critical in making ECD a habit for the community. Additionally, budgeting for ECD is essential to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to support the development of young children.

Overall, Dr. Innouso's remarks highlighted the crucial role that UNICEF plays in promoting early childhood development and ensuring that all children have access to the resources they need to thrive. His insights underscore the importance of an integrated approach to ECD and the need for community-level engagement to create lasting change.

Mr. Muhammad Rafique Tahir, Sr. Advisor at AIOU, reflected on the successful journey of organising international conferences on Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Pakistan.



It all started in 2017 under the leadership of Mr. Baligh-ur-Rehman, the then Minister of Education.

This 4th conference is a testament to the continued commitment of key stakeholders from the government, academia, UN agencies and the private sector to promote ECD in Pakistan.

The conference provided a platform to explore and discuss key topics related to ECD in Pakistan. These topics included ECD Landscape and Governance, Prioritising Investment, Implementation of Nurturing Care Framework, Identification of Developmental Delays & Intervention, Impact of Floods on ECD, ECD in Emergency, maternal depression, positive child development, mental health, and the use of technology in ECD. In addition, the conference featured interactive workshops on Inclusion in ECD, Impact of Play-based Learning, and ECD in Emergencies.

The conference included nine concurrent sessions focused on important aspects of ECD such as health, nutrition, safety, security, responsive caregiving, early learning, and development. Two parallel sessions were held on the role of non-formal and distance education in ECD and the role of Allama Iqbal Open University in promoting ECD. Overall, the conference was a great success and served as

an important platform for exchanging ideas, sharing best practices, and exploring innovative solutions to promote ECD in Pakistan.

Dr. Saba Shuja, ECD Manager, UNICEF presented a comprehensive set of key recommendations to further strengthen Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiatives in Pakistan. These recommendations were the result of two days of engaging and thought-provoking discussions among policymakers, academics, practitioners, and other key stakeholders (Annex)



Annexures

Annex I: Conference Recommendation

- Urgent endorsement and dissemination of ECD Policy Framework, Index & Standards
- Capacity building, orientation, and Advocacy of Parliamentarians on ECD
- Capacity building of ECD governance structures
- Promulgation of ECD legislations – BMS Code Act/FFP
- Strengthen ECD coordination mechanisms
- Accreditation of ECD curriculum and development of the ECD workforce
- Inclusion of ECD module into higher education studies
- Capacity building on ECD financing – How to cost ...
- Community-level ECD approach – scale up while continuing the facility-level approach
- ECD in Emergencies – should be part of all the Disaster Response and Management Plans and authorities
- Inclusion of marginalized children and children with disabilities with a focus on families
- Device a mechanism for Engaging all the relevant stakeholders
- Stock-taking on ECD work

Annex II: Conference Core Committee

S. No.	Name	Designation/Organization	Committee Position
1.	Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood	Vice Chancellor, Allama Iqbal Open University	Conference Chair
2.	Mr. Muhammad Rafique Tahir	Sr. Advisor, AIOU and Board of Director, Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood	Co-Chair of Conference
3.	Ms. Khadija Khan	CEO, Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood Education	Conference Convener
4.	Mr. Baddar Uzaman	Programme Officer, Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives	Co-Convener
5.	Dr. Saba Shuja	Manager ECD, UNICEF	Co-Convener
6.	Dr. Qudsia Uzma	World Health Organisation	Co-Convener
7.	Mr. Jalal Hunzai	CEO, Rupani Foundation	Co-Convener
8.	Prof. Dr. Fazal ur Rehman	Professor, Chairman Department of ECE & ETE, AIOU	Co-Convener
9.	Dr. Muahmmad Athar Hussian	Associate Professor, DNFCE, AIOU	Conference Secretary
10.	Dr. Jahan Ara Shams	Assistant Professor, ECE & ETED, AIOU	Conference Coodinator
11.	Ms. Sabha Munir	Manager Communication & Outreach	Conference Coodinator
1.	Mr. Kamran Indereas	Manager Finance	Conference Coodinator

Annex III: Terms of Reference for the Conference Core Committee

The conference Core Committee is responsible for:

- The overall management of all aspects of the conference, including programme design, operational, logistics, travel, outreach, marketing and resource mobilisation
- Making policy decisions about the Conference budget, programme, format, chief guests, speakers, marketing, materials and participants etc
- Sending invitations to chief guests, getting confirmation and preparing talking points for them
- Formation of sub-committees and assigning ToRs
- Providing guidelines to all the sub-committees
- Getting regular updates from the conveners of all sub-committees and providing required support to them
- Playing an active role in resource mobilisation through engaging key donors and stakeholders
- Resolving issues arising related to the conference activities
- Assisting foreign delegations and speakers regarding all the matters i.e. conference information, visa, travel and accommodation etc.
- Updating the Minister of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives(MoPD&SIs) about the Conference preparations and execution



📍 Office # 3-6, First Floor, The Time Square, G-8 Markaz, Islamabad - Pakistan.

☎ 051-8730495 ✉ secretariat@pafec.org

📘 facebook.com/pafec.org

📷 instagram.com/pakistanallianceforec

📧 @AllianceEarly

🌐 pafec.org