



Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood

Directors' Report

**1st July 2023 - 30th June
2024**



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Executive Summary

The Directors of the Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC) are pleased to present the annual report along with the audited financial statement for the year ending June 2024. This narrative report covers the activities undertaken by PAFEC from July 1, 2023, to June 2024.

Key programme activities during this period included:

- Continuing the podcast series on Early Childhood Development (ECD), which was launched in partnership with IbeX Media Network in May 2023.
- Organizing two symposiums on 'Positive Parenting' in collaboration with the Pakistan Pediatric Association, UNICEF, WHO, and PEHCHAAN, held simultaneously at Lahore and Rawalpindi Medical University.
- Providing technical support to UNICEF to train government counterparts and CSOs on ECD.
- Delivering presentations to the SUN Civil Society Network, National Commission for Human Development, and Pakistan Girl Guides Association.
- Compiling and distributing the report of the 4th International Conference on ECD to over 100 key partners.
- Participating in workshops and webinars on different themes of ECD organized by global ECD networks and other key partners such as UNICEF, WHO, ECDAN, and Harvard

Khadija Khan

Name of the Chief Executive Officer

Signature of the Chief Executive Officer

Date: 21.10.2024



Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood

Introduction

Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC) is a national alliance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) stakeholders in Pakistan. PAFEC is registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), under section 42 of the Companies Act, 2017. The Alliance is governed by a high-profile Board of Directors which includes serving and retired government officials, representatives of civil society organizations, and academia, who are making a difference in the field of early childhood development, education, health, nutrition, child protection, and community development. The Alliance's secretariat is in Islamabad.

Below is the narrative report for the period July 2023 to June 2024.



Podcast Series on Early Childhood Development in Collaboration with Ibox Media Network

Introduction

Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC), in collaboration with the Ibox Media Network, launched a podcast series titled '*Transforming Society through Early Childhood Development*' in May 2023. So far, 21 episodes have been recorded and broadcasted, featuring renowned experts in various aspects of Early Childhood Development (ECD). These experts include ECD practitioners, pediatricians, psychiatrists, neurodevelopmental specialists, occupational and speech therapists, parental educators, child protection experts, community development professionals, and nutritionists. Below are the details of the podcasts.

1. Importance of Early Childhood Development – 1st 1000 days as Critical Window of Opportunity

In the first episode of "Early Childhood Development" podcast series, Ms. Khadija engages in a detailed discussion with Mr. Amir Hussain, focusing on the critical significance of early childhood development from conception to the early years of life up to age 8. The conversation dives deep into the science of brain development, the vital role of parental mental health, and the long-term implications of early experiences on a child's future.

Ms. Khadija begins by emphasizing the rapid brain growth that occurs by the age of two, noting that by a child's second birthday, 90% of the brain development has already occurred. She underscores the misconception that very young children don't require significant engagement beyond feeding and sleeping. Proper stimulation and interaction are crucial, even before birth. She also highlights how the emotional state of the mother, particularly her happiness and mental well-being, directly influences the child's nature and personality.

Ms. Khadija further adds that a child absorbs everything from the environment up until the age of eight, with many cognitive abilities fully developed by then. She stresses that development begins not at birth, but during pregnancy. She advocates for mothers to engage with their unborn children by talking to them, sharing the excitement of their arrival, and forming an early bond that will help shape the child's emotional and cognitive growth.

Highlighting the link between a mother's mental health and child development, Ms. Khadija said that maternal stress or depression can lead to developmental deficiencies in the child hampering



him/her to grow optimally. Talking about the implications of malnourishment among children, she referred to the alarming issue of stunting, a condition that affects nearly 40% of children in Pakistan. It impacts children's physical and cognitive development, often begins in the womb when the mother experiences poor nutrition or high stress levels. She explains that stunting limits the potential of these children to grow into productive adults, creating a generation of individuals performing below average in both physical and cognitive capacities. Ms. Khadija notes that despite the widespread issue, there is still a significant gap in public awareness and action regarding early childhood development.

Addressing the widespread misunderstanding of when child development begins, Ms. Khadija emphasizes that it starts long before the child starts going to school. She corrects the misconception that learning, and development only start once the child is older, explaining that by then, many critical developmental windows have already closed. She reinforces that the process of development starts the moment parents decide to have a child, as their mental, physical, and emotional health will shape the future of their offspring.

The conversation moves into discussing the "three phases" of early childhood development. Ms. Khadija explains that the first phase, known as the 'first 1,000 days,' begins at conception and lasts until the child is two years old. This period is crucial for brain development and lays the foundation for the child's holistic development. The second phase, she explains, covers ages two to five, during which brain development continues along with the rapid development of other domains of the child, and the third phase spans ages five to eight, when the child begins formal schooling.

A significant point of the discussion revolves around the concept of early stimulation. Ms. Khadija stresses the need for parents to interact with their children even before birth. Activities such as reading, talking to the baby, and listening to music have a positive impact on the child's cognitive and emotional development. Mr. Amir supports this view, sharing that in some countries, pregnant mothers follow curricula designed to stimulate the child's development in the womb through music, conversation, and physical exercises.

Both Ms. Khadija and Mr. Amir agree that parenting is a lifelong responsibility. Ms. Khadija emphasizes that development does not stop at birth or during the early years but continues throughout life however, the speed a child develops into adulthood declines gradually. Unfortunately, many parents mistakenly believe that schools will take full responsibility for their child's development once they are enrolled. However, both hosts stress that a conducive environment at home is essential for a child's early cognitive and emotional growth. Ms. Khadija highlights the dangers of "toxic stress," explaining that children who grow up in environments



filled with stress, conflict, or neglect can suffer long-term damage to their brain, which affects their entire future.

The discussion further touches upon the economic value of investing in early childhood development. Ms. Khadija highlights the research of the famous economist James Heckman, which shows that every dollar invested in early childhood development yields a return of up to thirteen dollars for society. This return comes in the form of healthier, more productive adults who contribute positively to the economy. She emphasizes that investments in the first 1,000 days of life not only benefit individuals but have far-reaching effects on society and the economy.

The importance of integrated policies also becomes a focal point of the conversation. Ms. Khadija stresses that while some progress has been made in developing early childhood development policies in Pakistan, their implementation remains insufficient. She calls for a multi-sectoral approach, involving collaboration between health, nutrition, and education sectors to ensure that efforts are aligned and effective. Mr. Amir agrees, pointing out that many existing programmes in Pakistan, such as those related to health and nutrition, are working in silos with little coordination. This lack of integration limits the effectiveness of these programs, despite their good intentions.

In conclusion, both Ms. Khadija and Mr. Amir agree on the urgent need for better awareness, capacity building, design and implementation of multisector policy for early childhood development. They emphasize that early experiences shape a child's entire future, and investing in these critical years is not just a matter of individual success but a national priority. The episode serves as a call to action for parents, educators, policymakers, and society at large to recognize the importance of these formative years and work together to ensure that every child can reach their full potential.

2. Beyond Breadwinning: Exploring Role of Father in the Upbringing of Children

This episode of the Early Childhood Development podcast focuses on the critical role fathers play in parenting, alongside mothers, and highlights the importance of shared responsibilities, creating nurturing environments, and early engagement in a child's life. Mr. Amir Hussain opens the conversation by discussing how parents often wonder why their children don't listen as they grow older. He points out that this behavior stems from parents themselves not listening to their children and not interacting with them in their formative years. If parents are distracted by things



like their mobile phones, children will mimic that behavior. He stresses the need for fathers to share household duties, just like mothers, to create a balanced family environment.

Ms. Khadija begins by thanking Mr. Amir and introducing today's focus on fatherhood, a topic often overlooked in parenting discussions. She addresses a common misconception that a child's upbringing is primarily the mother's responsibility. Ms. Khadija emphasizes that both parents are equally important in a child's development, starting before the child is even born. Fathers must provide emotional support to their wives during pregnancy, ensuring a nurturing environment that positively impacts the child's development.

Ms. Khadija highlights that while genetics do play a role in a child's intelligence, proper nurturing is crucial for developing those natural abilities. She stresses the importance of the father's active involvement in the household and explains how the relationship between parents can directly affect the emotional and psychological development of their child. Fathers should participate in the daily routines of their children, spend time with them, and contribute to household chores, which creates a healthier family dynamic.

One key point discussed is the traditional roles in Pakistani households, where fathers often don't engage as actively in child-rearing or household responsibilities. Both Mr. Amir and Ms. Khadija agree that these roles need to evolve, especially in urban settings where mothers are increasingly working alongside fathers. Fathers must redefine their roles, not only to share responsibilities but to create an environment of mutual respect and cooperation.

Ms. Khadija stresses that parenting is not just about taking care of financial matters but about spending quality time with children, including playing, reading and storytelling to them from an early age to build strong bonds. This early investment in a child's emotional development is just as important as taking care of other needs. The traditional notion that fathers are only authority figures needs to shift towards more nurturing and interactive roles.

Another significant issue discussed is how children learn by observing their parents. If a father comes home and immediately begins watching TV or using his phone, the child will likely adopt similar habits. Therefore, it is essential for fathers to model good behavior, encouraging their children to explore, learn, and engage with the world around them. Parents must create structured routines and spend quality time together, fostering an environment of trust and communication.

The podcast also touches on the social pressures in modern society, where parents often feel the need to push their children towards academic success. Both Mr. Amir and Ms. Khadija acknowledge that while education is important, there is too much focus on grades and



competition. This pressure often leads to stress for both parents and children. Ms. Khadija suggests that parents should allow their children to ask questions and explore, encouraging critical thinking from an early age rather than simply focusing on academic achievements.

The conversation further explores the harmful impact of excessive screen time on children's development. Ms. Khadija points out that while children in rural areas may have less exposure to electronic devices, urban children often spend too much time on screens, which negatively affects their physical and cognitive growth. She encourages parents, especially fathers, to engage in outdoor activities with their children and limit screen time.

In conclusion, the podcast highlights the evolving role of fathers in modern parenting. Both Mr. Amir and Ms. Khadija stress that fatherhood is not just about authority or financial support but about active involvement in all aspects of a child's upbringing. Fathers play a crucial role in shaping their child's emotional and intellectual development, and their participation is essential for creating a balanced, nurturing, and supportive family environment.

3. Raising Resilient Children: Balancing Traditional Advice with Modern Parenting Techniques

The discussion begins with Ms. Khadija addressing the complexities of positive parenting within joint family systems. She highlights the challenges parents face from conflicting advice drawing on traditional experiences that often confuses parents who strive to integrate these traditional methods with contemporary child-rearing practices. Despite the value of ancestral wisdom, Ms. Khadija stresses the necessity for modern approaches that align with current child development science to create a nurturing environment for children.

Ms. Khadija raises a common concern about parental anxiety, especially when their child does not respond as expected during the first few months of life. She asks, "What should parents do if their 3- or 4-month-old baby isn't responding or hitting developmental milestones like hearing or vision?" In response, Ms. Shafia emphasizes the importance of early detection and intervention, explaining that any concerns about a child's development, especially around hearing or visual responses, should be addressed immediately. She advises parents not to wait, particularly in rural areas where children may not have access to early screenings. Shafia highlights that initial screenings conducted in hospitals are crucial, but these checks are often



missed in children born at home through midwives. She stresses that parents should seek medical help as soon as possible if they suspect developmental delays.

The conversation shifts to the confusion parents face due to the conflicting advice they receive in joint family households. Ms. Khadija asks, “How can new parents navigate the conflicting advice they receive from family elders, such as grandmothers?” Ms. Shafia acknowledges this as a common issue, particularly when grandparents offer advice based on older child-rearing practices. She emphasizes the importance of finding a balance between respecting traditional wisdom and following modern, evidence-based parenting techniques. While family advice can be helpful, Ms. Shafia explains, it is critical for parents to adapt these suggestions to align with today’s knowledge of child development, which includes addressing new challenges like technology use and the need for more direct parent-child interaction.

Ms. Khadija then asks about the role of a parenting coach, wondering, “How can a parenting coach help new parents who are feeling overwhelmed by all this conflicting advice?” Ms. Shafia explains that a parenting coach serves as an intermediary between traditional practices and modern parenting methods, offering professional guidance to help parents make informed decisions. She stresses that all parents, regardless of their educational background, have natural instincts to raise their children, but they can greatly benefit from the additional insights and strategies provided by a parenting coach. Ms. Shafia highlights that her role involves educating parents on how to address the challenges of today’s world while maintaining a balance with cultural values.

The discussion continues with a focus on the misconception that child-rearing is solely the mother’s responsibility. Ms. Khadija points out, there’s a widespread belief that raising a child is mainly the mother’s job, but fathers have an equally important role to play.” Ms. Shafia fully agrees, emphasizing that fathers are essential in a child’s upbringing, and their involvement starts even before the child is born. Fathers provide emotional and physical support to the mother during pregnancy and beyond, which directly affects the child’s emotional and intellectual development. Ms. Shafia explains that both parents need to be equally involved in raising the child, as this creates a balanced and nurturing home environment that is conducive to healthy development.

Ms. Khadija shifts the conversation to the role of modern technology in parenting, asking, “How can parents deal with the overwhelming presence of gadgets and technology when raising their children?” Ms. Shafia acknowledges that while technology can be useful, it often leads to overstimulation and distraction, both for parents and children. She advises parents to limit their children’s screen time and focus instead on activities that encourage play-based learning and



creativity. She warns that overreliance on gadgets can hinder children's natural development and encourages parents to engage more directly with their children through meaningful interaction, such as storytelling and outdoor play.

The topic of child behavior is then discussed, with Ms. Khadija asking, "What should parents do when their children throw tantrums, and how can they manage these behavioral challenges?" Ms. Shafia explains that tantrums are a normal part of child development, often arising when a child cannot express their emotions adequately. She emphasizes that harsh discipline, such as hitting or yelling at, is not effective and can damage the parent-child relationship. Instead, Ms. Shafia recommends positive discipline, where parents calmly engage with their children to understand the root cause of the tantrum and guide them through their emotions in a nurturing way. She stresses the importance of patience and empathy in helping children learn how to manage their feelings.

Next, Ms. Khadija asks about the role of toys and learning tools, wondering, "How can parents effectively use toys to support their child's development without overwhelming them?" Ms. Shafia advises parents to be selective in choosing age-appropriate toys that promote learning and creativity. She cautions against giving children too many toys, as this can lead to overstimulation and reduce the developmental benefits of play. Instead, she encourages parents to introduce toys gradually and focus on those that encourage fine motor skills and problem-solving. Ms. Shafia also points out that simple, homemade toys can be just as effective in fostering emotional bonds and development, as they often carry sentimental value and promote creativity.

The conversation concludes with a discussion on preparing children for school. Ms. Khadija asks, "How can parents prepare their children for the transition from home to school, and what role does a set routine play in this process?" Ms. Shafia emphasizes that establishing a consistent routine at home is crucial in helping children adjust to the structured environment of school. She explains that children who follow regular schedules for meals, play, and learning are better equipped to handle the demands of school life. Ms. Shafia also encourages parents to engage their children in early learning activities, such as reading and storytelling, which stimulate their intellectual curiosity and help ease the transition to formal education.

In her closing remarks, Ms. Khadija thanks Ms. Shafia for sharing her valuable insights into positive parenting and the importance of balancing traditional and modern methods. Ms. Shafia concludes by encouraging parents to remain proactive and engaged in their child's development, using a blend of traditional wisdom and modern scientific knowledge to create a supportive and nurturing environment. She emphasizes that positive parenting is about building strong



emotional connections with children, providing structure, and fostering open communication within the family.

4. Child Rights, Safety & Protection

In this episode, Ms. Khadija opens a vital discussion on the issue of child abuse, particularly emphasizing how the abusers are often people the child knows and trusts, such as close family members. She highlights the shift in focus from the traditional warnings about strangers to the current reality where children are increasingly vulnerable within their own homes and families. This is a deeply troubling social issue that is rarely discussed openly, making it more critical to address. Ms. Khadija asks, "Dr. Shahzad, could you tell us about the laws of in Pakistan that have been made to protect children? What are the essential laws regarding child protection that parents should be aware of?" Dr. Shahzad Mithani, an expert on child protection, begins by providing a historical context to the topic.

He explains that the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees the protection of all citizens, including children, and that the country has committed to several international treaties, the most significant being the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). He points out that Pakistan was the first Muslim country to ratify this convention, which outlines a comprehensive set of child rights, such as the right to life, development, and protection from harm. Despite these commitments, the implementation of these laws varies across the country. For instance, while Article 25A of the Constitution ensures the right to free and compulsory education for children aged 5 to 16, not all parents are aware of this, particularly in rural areas.

Ms. Khadija, recognizing the gap in awareness, inquires, "many parents, especially in rural areas, might not be aware of these laws. How can we ensure that parents are educated about the rights their children have?" Dr. Shahzad agrees, explaining that while the internet has made information more accessible, it does not always reach rural or undereducated populations effectively. He highlights that many parents, particularly in underprivileged areas, remain unaware of their child's legal rights, such as the right to free education or healthcare. This lack of knowledge leaves children vulnerable, as parents may not realize that the state is obligated to protect their child's basic rights. He further explains that when parents are unaware of these protections, their children are at greater risk of exploitation, neglect, and even abuse.

Ms. Khadija then asks a critical question, "What practical steps should be taken at the grassroots level to raise awareness among parents?" Dr. Shahzad underscores the importance of community



involvement. He suggests engaging local leaders, such as religious figures, teachers, and community heads, to serve as advocates for child protection. These local influencers are in a unique position to educate parents about their responsibilities and their children's rights. He recommends implementing grassroots campaigns in schools, mosques, and community centers to ensure that parents, especially in rural areas, are informed about child protection laws and how to safeguard their children's futures. Additionally, Dr. Shahzad stresses the need for the government to actively promote these rights through educational programmes and media campaigns, using local radio and television stations to reach wider audiences. Collaboration between government agencies and civil society organizations is essential to creating a unified strategy that reaches every corner of the country.

As the conversation shifts to child safety, Ms. Khadija probes deeper, asking, "What can we do to ensure that children are not only safe but also protected from abuse and exploitation, especially in rural or underdeveloped areas?" Dr. Shahzad emphasizes that child protection is a multifaceted issue that requires addressing various forms of abuse, including emotional, physical, sexual, and neglect. He explains that neglect is a form of abuse that is often overlooked. For example, something as simple as failing to register a child's birth can have long-term consequences, as it deprives the child of a legal identity, which is necessary for accessing education, healthcare, and other basic services. He highlights that many families, especially in impoverished areas, are unaware of the importance of birth registration and its impact on the child's future.

Moreover, Dr. Shahzad touches on the issue of child labor, explaining that economic hardships often force parents to send their children to work in unsafe conditions. Although there are laws like the Factory Act and the Shops and Establishment Ordinance that prohibit child labor, the lack of awareness among parents means that these laws are not always enforced. Children in these situations are at risk of exploitation and abuse, often working in hazardous environments with no legal protection.

Ms. Khadija, concerned about the lack of awareness around these protections, asks, "how can we actively promote awareness of these protections? Social media, television, and other platforms are available, but are they being used effectively to reach parents?" Dr. Shahzad acknowledges that while these platforms exist, they are not being used to their full potential. He points out that despite the reach of social media and television, the level of engagement on child protection issues remains low. He argues that the government needs to take a more proactive role in promoting child protection laws and ensuring that parents and guardians understand their responsibilities. Dr. Shahzad suggests creating dedicated segments on child safety on popular



media platforms to raise awareness. He also emphasizes that civil society organizations are already working on raising awareness but need more support from the government to scale their efforts effectively.

Towards the end of the conversation, Ms. Khadija highlights the root of the issue by stating that the core issue seems to be that many parents are simply unaware of their children's rights. If they don't know these rights, they can't demand for them, which leaves their children unprotected and vulnerable to exploitation. Dr. Shahzad agrees and stresses that it is crucial for parents to be informed about their children's legal rights. Without this knowledge, parents cannot advocate for their children or protect them from abuse, neglect, or exploitation. He calls for a concerted effort to ensure that parents, regardless of their education level or location, are equipped with the information they need to safeguard their children's future.

In closing, Ms. Khadija thanks Dr. Shahzad for his invaluable insights and calls on listeners, whether they are parents, educators, or policymakers, to take an active role in spreading this critical information about child protection and rights. Dr. Shahzad reinforces that education and awareness are the first steps towards building a safer, more just society for all children in Pakistan.

This conversation underscores the urgent need for community engagement, government-led initiatives, and increased awareness among parents about their children's legal rights. By working together, we can create a society where every child is protected, and their rights are upheld across all sectors of life.

5. Play-based Learning: Enabling Children to Thrive

In the enlightening episode of our podcast series on "Early Childhood Development," Ms. Arooj Malik, CEO of Training Institute for Mentors Excellence and a mother deeply involved in the education sector, discusses the crucial role of play in a child's development. She starts by addressing societal misconceptions surrounding play, asserting that play is inherent to a child's nature and essential from the earliest stages.

As the conversation unfolds, Ms. Khadija asks about the application of play in environments with limited resources, particularly in rural areas, and the importance of traditional games in developing various faculties in children. Ms. Arooj emphasizes that traditional games such as hopscotch, hide and seek, and playing with clay are vital for developing a child's physical



coordination, cognitive abilities, and social skills. These activities encourage children to interact, cooperate, and solve problems together, fostering essential developmental skills through natural play.

Further into the discussion, Ms. Khadija raises a concern about the harsh disciplinary approaches reported in recent studies and asks Ms. Arooj for practical ways to engage children positively at home to avoid such practices. Ms. Arooj advocates for engaging children in simple yet educational activities like sorting beans or folding napkins, which not only help in developing motor skills and patience but also channel the children's energy positively. She highlights the importance of such engagements in building a cooperative and interactive relationship between parents and children, reducing the need for harsh discipline.

Ms. Khadija then inquires about the impact of play on academic performance. Ms. Arooj details how children who engage in play-based learning exhibit improved problem-solving abilities, focus, and creativity, contributing positively to their academic achievements. She explains that play helps children understand and apply abstract concepts in real-world scenarios, enhancing their learning and retention.

Toward the end of their dialogue, Ms. Khadija asks how parents can create an environment where children feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. Ms. Arooj suggests integrating play into daily family activities to strengthen emotional bonds and build trust. She recommends regular family games and creative projects that promote communication and mutual understanding, creating a nurturing space where children feel supported and heard.

6. Dyslexic Children - How to Support Dyslexic Children to Develop Optimally?

In the 6th episode of the Podcast Series on "Early Childhood Development," Ms. Irum Mumtaz, the CEO of the Institute of Dyslexia Education and Attitudinal Studies (IDEAS), begins the conversation with gratitude for the opportunity to discuss dyslexia, an essential topic that requires more attention and understanding. In response to Ms. Khadija's question about dyslexia, Ms. Irum dives into its definition. She explains that dyslexia, originating from the Greek words "dys" (problem) and "lexia" (words), refers to a child's difficulty in writing, reading, and understanding. Contrary to common misconceptions, dyslexia is not related to intelligence; it represents a challenge in processing language, not a disease or weakness.



Ms. Irum continues to shed light on dyslexia's various aspects, mentioning related conditions like dyscalculia (difficulty with numbers), dysgraphia (impaired handwriting), dyspraxia (fine and gross motor skills challenges), and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). She emphasizes that dyslexic individuals can be both normal and gifted, stressing the importance of recognizing their potential.

Ms. Khadija raises concerns about parents' awareness of dyslexia and questions why fathers might not be as informed as mothers. Ms. Irum shares her observations, highlighting the societal pressures placed on mothers and the lack of involvement from fathers. Despite these challenges, she commends the determination of mothers nationwide, who, upon learning about dyslexia, actively seek her help for their children. Ms. Irum emphasizes the urgency of parental involvement, as well as the need for collaborative efforts between parents, educators, and institutions. She criticizes the prevailing educational system, emphasizing the importance of teaching children beyond academic knowledge, instilling a sense of responsibility and awareness about their rights and duties.

The conversation then shifts to the lack of understanding within society about dyslexia. Ms. Irum shares her own journey, how she founded IDEAS to address this gap, and how Aamir Khan's film "Taare Zameen Par" played a crucial role in raising awareness about dyslexia. She stresses the significance of early detection and parental education, highlighting how dyslexic children often face blame and labeling, both at home and in school. Ms. Khadija acknowledges the pivotal role Ms. Irum played in passing the dyslexia bill in parliament, recognizing her efforts in advocating for dyslexic children.

7. Nourish Today for a Healthier Tomorrow – Addressing Stunting in Pakistan

In this episode of our podcast series on "Early Childhood Development," Mr. Badar-uz-Zaman, the Programme Policy Officer at the SUN Secretariat, Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, discussed the vital role of nutrition in the early stages of a child's development. He shares insights on the foundational importance of nutrition from pre-conception through early childhood, emphasizing the intergenerational cycle of health that affects children's developmental trajectories.

As the conversation unfolds, Mr. Badar details the government's multifaceted approach to combating malnutrition and enhancing early childhood development across Pakistan. He outlines various initiatives aimed at promoting diversified food sources, integrating nutrition education



into school curricula, and making significant investments in water and sanitation to improve children's health outcomes.

In response to Ms. Khadija's inquiry about the Government of Pakistan's role in addressing the multigenerational cycle of health, Mr. Badar highlights several government initiatives that focus on nutritional challenges, including the introduction of kitchen gardening and poultry farming. He discusses the optimization of school curricula to include nutrition and the significant focus on water and sanitation to combat malnutrition.

Ms. Khadija then asks how communities are being engaged to change behaviors around nutrition, particularly highlighting the challenges of awareness in rural areas. Mr. Badar discusses the pivotal role of community engagement and awareness, mentioning comprehensive plans involving celebrities, social media, and school programmes designed to educate and engage communities about nutrition and healthy dietary choices. These efforts aim to address local myths and misconceptions about food and nutrition, emphasizing the need for widespread behavioral change.

When Ms. Khadija raises a question about the direct implications of maternal malnutrition on fetal development and the mother's health, Mr. Badar stresses the importance of ensuring that mothers receive a balanced diet enriched with necessary nutrients to support both their health and the optimal development of their child. He explains that inadequate nutrition before and during pregnancy can lead to significant developmental challenges for the child and health issues for the mother.

Later, Ms. Khadija mentions the 2018 Nutrition Survey, which found a high percentage of adolescent malnutrition, and asks how the government is addressing adolescent health. Mr. Badar acknowledges the challenges posed by limited research and budget priorities in Pakistan but notes ongoing efforts like the Adolescent Nutrition Strategy, which includes initiatives such as iron-folic acid supplementation and deworming programmes focused on middle and high school girls.

The podcast concludes with Mr. Badar expressing gratitude for the opportunity to discuss such crucial topics and hopes that the insights shared will positively impact the listeners. Ms. Khadija thanks him for his valuable contributions and expresses hope for future discussions that continue to benefit from his expertise.



8. Foundational Learning: Building Life Skills Beyond Literacy and Numeracy

In this enriching episode of our podcast series on Early Childhood Development, Ms. Samina Ghafoor delves into the critical aspects of foundational learning and its broader implications beyond just literacy

and numeracy. Emphasizing the significant role of parents in shaping their children's future, Ms. Samina explores how even uneducated parents can profoundly influence their children's social, emotional, functional life skills, and moral development from the home environment.

Ms. Khadija introduces the discussion by highlighting common misconceptions about foundational learning in Pakistan, pointing out that while many associate it only with literacy and numeracy, social-emotional learning is equally vital and often begins at home. She invites Ms. Samina to elaborate on when children start learning and what roles parents, caregivers, and family members play in positively building the foundation for learning from the start. Ms. Samina responds by underscoring that foundational learning indeed starts even before birth, emphasizing the importance of parental engagement during pregnancy. She explains that activities like talking to children, reading, and engaging in cognitive exercises like puzzles or chess can significantly enhance a child's early cognitive development. These interactions help lay the groundwork for later learning and social-emotional skills.

Following up, Ms. Khadija discusses the scientific basis for early sensory development, including hearing in the womb, and how positive or negative experiences can affect a child's cognitive and personality development. She asks Ms. Samina to expand on how specific activities performed by expecting mothers can impact the child. Ms. Samina elaborates on the cognitive benefits of engaging expecting mothers in stimulating activities, noting that such practices not only prepare the child for future learning challenges but also foster early cognitive skills that are crucial once the child begins formal education.

The conversation then shifts to the role of the education system, where Ms. Samina laments that many schools, especially within the public sector, are ill-prepared to meet the early learning needs of children. She stresses the need for schools to integrate cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and language development into their curricula to provide a holistic educational experience from the earliest years.

Concluding the discussion, Ms. Khadija and Ms. Samina emphasize the holistic nature of foundational learning. They advocate for educational approaches that encompass all developmental domains, not just academic ones. Ms. Samina highlights the need for parents,



teachers, and caregivers to collaborate closely to ensure that every child receives a balanced and comprehensive early education that supports all aspects of their development.

9. Importance of Nutrition and Child Development

In an enlightening episode of our podcast series on Early Childhood Development, Dr. Nousheen Abbas, a clinical nutritionist with a background in public health, explores the profound impacts of nutrition on early childhood development and societal well-being. Dr. Nousheen shares her journey in the field of nutrition, emphasizing that foundational nutrition practices are crucial not only for filling stomachs but also for determining long-term health outcomes for individuals and future generations.

Ms. Khadija prompts Dr. Nousheen to explain the connection between a mother's nutrition and its impact on her child's health. Dr. Nousheen highlights the deep connection between a mother's well-being and the long-term health of her child. She emphasizes that if the mother is malnourished, anemic, or vitamin-deficient, these deficiencies are likely to be passed on to the child. To address these issues, she advocates for improving young girls' nutrition from adolescence and providing pregnant women with appropriate care, particularly during critical periods of pregnancy.

Dr. Nousheen further highlights the cycle of malnutrition that often passes from one generation to the next, affecting both physical and cognitive development. She points out that over 40% of children in Pakistan suffer from stunted growth, with malnutrition being particularly severe in rural areas. Dr. Nousheen stresses that addressing nutritional deficiencies early in mothers and children is key to breaking this cycle and building a healthier society. Delving deeper, Ms. Khadija asks about societal norms affecting children's nutrition, such as the preferential treatment of male children in food distribution. Dr. Nousheen confirms that these norms still exist and discusses the detrimental effects they have on female children and mothers, perpetuating malnutrition and poor health outcomes.

On the topic of nutrition during pregnancy, Ms. Khadija inquires about the specific nutrients that are crucial during different stages of pregnancy. Dr. Nousheen emphasizes the importance of iron, calcium, and vitamins in a pregnant woman's diet and advocates for the consumption of local foods like whole wheat, lentils, yogurt, and leafy greens to meet these needs. Addressing the link between poverty and nutrition, Ms. Khadija explores whether economic factors are the sole contributors to malnutrition. Dr. Nousheen argues that while poverty is a significant factor,



issues like food wastage and distribution also play critical roles. She calls for better resource management to mitigate the effects of poverty on nutrition.

Exploring the connection between nutrition and mental health, Ms. Khadija seeks Dr. Nousheen's expertise on how poor nutrition affects children's mental well-being. Dr. Nousheen explains that malnutrition can lead to behavioral issues, lack of focus, and low energy, all of which impact a child's mental health and cognitive development. Focusing on post-pregnancy nutrition, Ms. Khadija discusses the often-neglected dietary needs of lactating mothers. Dr. Nousheen stresses the importance of ensuring that lactating mothers receive a balanced diet to support both their health and their baby's development.

In her closing remarks, Dr. Nousheen underscores the importance of consuming fresh, nutritious food and maintaining hydration and physical activity. She leaves the audience with the message, "You are what you eat," encouraging parents to prioritize healthy eating habits to ensure a robust foundation for their children's development.

10. From Early Signs to Empowered Solutions: Navigating Neurodevelopmental Challenges

In a pivotal episode of our podcast series on Early Childhood Development, Dr. Semra Salik, a renowned clinical psychologist and the founder of PsychCare, shares her expertise on neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) and their significant impact on children. Dr. Semra explains that NDDs affect brain development, influencing a child's ability to communicate, learn, and perform daily functions. Conditions such as ADHD, communication disorders, and intellectual disabilities are common, and identifying these early signs is crucial for timely intervention.

Ms. Khadija opens the discussion by welcoming Dr. Semra and inviting her to elaborate on her work at PsychCare and its importance in raising awareness about neurodevelopmental challenges. Dr. Semra describes her dual role in providing counseling and education, emphasizing that PsychCare, established to address children's mental health issues, collaborates with schools to enhance understanding and support for children facing these challenges.

Exploring the critical topic of NDDs, Ms. Khadija asks Dr. Semra to delineate what neurodevelopmental disorders entail, their types, and the significance of early detection. Dr. Semra highlights that early intervention is key, as conditions like autism, ADHD, and learning disorders can severely impact a child's development if not addressed promptly. At PsychCare, they focus on early screening and diagnostic assessments to provide children with the necessary support to thrive.



Ms. Khadija further inquires about how early parents can detect potential developmental issues, especially in critical developmental stages. Dr. Semra points out that while some physical developmental issues can be identified during pregnancy, neurodevelopmental disorders are typically observed within the first few years of a child's life. She stresses the importance of parents being vigilant about their child's milestones, such as speech and motor skills, to ensure early detection and intervention.

Addressing language development, Ms. Khadija questions the role of early stimulation in language skills and what interventions can assist children who are lagging. Dr. Semra underscores the essential role of sensory stimulation—such as touch, sight, and sound—in fostering cognitive and linguistic development from a very early age. She criticizes the over-reliance on screens which can impede this natural progression, advising parents to engage more directly with their children through traditional activities that promote speech and communication skills.

Throughout the podcast, Dr. Semra and Ms. Khadija delve into the challenges schools face in supporting children with NDDs, noting that many lack the resources or trained personnel to effectively identify and address these needs. Dr. Semra advocates for comprehensive teacher training and the development of inclusive educational practices to ensure that children with neurodevelopmental disorders receive appropriate support within mainstream educational settings.

Concluding the episode, Dr. Semra calls for enhanced community awareness and proactive involvement from all stakeholders, including parents, educators, and healthcare professionals, to create supportive environments where children with neurodevelopmental challenges can succeed. By fostering early intervention, sensory engagement, and inclusive education, society can empower these children to reach their full potential.

11. Floods and Feeding the Future: A Deep Dive into Climate Change Impact on Children's Nutrition

In a vital episode of our podcast series on Early Childhood Development, Dr. Nousheen Abbas shares profound insights into the impact of climate change and emergency situations, like the 2022 floods in Pakistan, on the nutrition and overall well-being of children. Throughout the discussion, Dr. Nousheen explores how malnutrition, stunted growth, and food insecurity are exacerbated by environmental disasters, stressing the need for comprehensive community and public health system preparedness for future challenges.



Ms. Khadija introduces the session by reflecting on previous discussions about children's nutrition and its crucial role in their development. She highlights the severe effects of the recent floods on children's health, prompting Dr. Nousheen to discuss the urgency of addressing these ongoing issues.

Dr. Nousheen explains the high rates of stunting and wasting among children in Pakistan, particularly in flood-affected areas like interior Sindh and Balochistan. She details how the floods have not only destroyed local agriculture and water sources but also left many families struggling to secure even basic meals, further intensifying malnutrition issues in these regions.

In response to Ms. Khadija's query about the worsening conditions in these flood-stricken areas and the measures being taken, Dr. Nousheen describes the struggles of families who have lost their livelihoods and homes. She emphasizes the long road to recovery, noting that many are still displaced and vulnerable to diseases due to weakened immunity and poor living conditions.

Ms. Khadija then asks about the challenges of nutrient absorption in children during disasters. Dr. Nousheen highlights how diarrheal diseases from contaminated water and unsanitary conditions can prevent children from absorbing the nutrients in relief foods, complicating efforts to address malnutrition effectively. Exploring the broader implications, Ms. Khadija questions how these absorption issues impact children's cognitive and physical development. Dr. Nousheen underscores that frequent illnesses and malnutrition during critical growth phases can significantly impair both cognitive abilities and physical health, setting back a child's developmental progress.

Shifting focus to community-based solutions, Ms. Khadija inquires about the training and role of local "champions" in disaster response. Dr. Nousheen discusses the initiative to train community members, including mothers and local leaders, to act as first responders, providing essential guidance on sanitation, hygiene, and basic nutrition during emergencies. Finally, Ms. Khadija asks about the role of educational institutions in preparing for future disasters. Dr. Nousheen stresses the importance of schools in promoting awareness about environmental conservation and healthy practices. She talks about training teachers and community leaders to educate and prepare children for a more sustainable future, emphasizing the need for long-term planning and action to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

The episode concludes with Dr. Nousheen expressing gratitude for the opportunity to share these insights, and Ms. Khadija thanking her for the enlightening discussion, hoping it will inspire listeners to take proactive steps toward addressing the challenges posed by climate change and ensuring healthier futures for children.



12. Ensuring Inclusive Education and Early Intervention for Children with Disabilities

In this insightful episode of our podcast series on "Early Childhood Development," Mr. Itfaq Khaliq Khan from Sightsavers discusses the critical need for inclusive education and early interventions for children with disabilities. He highlights the interconnectedness of hearing and vocabulary acquisition essential for language development and shares alarming statistics that about 15% of the global population lives with disabilities, with around 13 million children in Pakistan facing some form of disability or functional difficulty.

The conversation begins with Mr. Itfaq emphasizing the vital role of teachers and caregivers in supporting these children and the pressing need to strengthen their capacity through specialized training and development programmes. Sightsavers has taken proactive steps by developing courses and modules for inclusive education, which have been integrated into teacher training institutions to help teachers identify and support children with disabilities, promoting an inclusive environment where these children can learn alongside their peers.

Discussing the organization's overall objectives and community support, Mr. Itfaq shares his extensive experience in creating equity and inclusion for children and people with disabilities in education, health, and economic empowerment. He details his involvement in major initiatives, particularly focusing on professional development for teachers and inclusive learning assessments.

As the dialogue continues, Mr. Itfaq explains Sightsavers' strategic approach, grounded in the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. The organization works at policy, institutional, and community levels, emphasizing early detection of disabilities to ensure inclusive support from an early age.

Addressing the early detection of visual impairments in children, Mr. Itfaq notes that while vision begins developing during pregnancy, the most common time for detecting visual impairments is between the ages of 8 and 16 years. He stresses the importance of early screening to treat conditions like refractive errors, which can significantly impact a child's learning and participation in class.

On the topic of teachers as secondary caregivers, Mr. Itfaq describes Sightsavers' efforts to strengthen inclusive education systems through professional development, collaborating with



educational institutions to develop training modules that help teachers conduct basic screening for learning difficulties and providing individual support to children with disabilities. Responding to concerns about the exclusion of autistic children from classrooms due to behavioral challenges, Mr. Itfaq underscores that such exclusion is often due to stigma and misunderstanding about disabilities. He advocates for inclusive policies and proper teacher training to ensure that all children are adequately supported in their educational environments.

In his final remarks, Mr. Itfaq delivers key messages to parents, communities, and stakeholders on supporting children with disabilities. He urges understanding and acceptance of disability as a natural phenomenon and calls for collaborative efforts, including investment in data systems and resources for inclusive education, to promote a supportive environment where all children have equal opportunities to learn and thrive.

13. Maternal Depression and its Impact on Early Childhood Development

In the 13th episode of our podcast series on "Early Childhood Development," Dr. Abdul Wahab Yousafzai shared deep insights into the profound impact of maternal depression on early childhood development. He highlighted how societal attitudes and domestic violence contribute significantly to maternal depression, which not only affects mothers but also inflicts long-term psychological damage on children, potentially leading to developmental issues such as stunting.

Throughout the discussion, Dr. Yousafzai emphasized the critical periods of pregnancy and early childhood as essential for development, noting that maternal health during these times is crucial for both the child's physical and psychological well-being. He advocated for a holistic approach to addressing maternal depression, which includes biological, psychological, and social interventions, stressing that emotional support for the child is as vital as nutritional support.

The conversation explored the definition of maternal depression, distinguishing between antenatal depression during pregnancy and postpartum depression after childbirth. Dr. Yousafzai pointed out the social and familial implications of maternal depression, particularly its impact on a child's development. He discussed how a mother's psychological and physical health during pregnancy directly influences the baby's growth, with maternal depression potentially affecting the baby's brain development and physical health. Addressing the connection between maternal depression and stunting, Dr. Yousafzai explained that maternal depression could lead to inadequate nutritional and emotional care for the child, which is crucial for avoiding developmental delays.



The discussion also covered the prevalence of postpartum depression in Pakistan, especially in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where social factors like domestic violence exacerbate the condition. Dr. Yousafzai shared that awareness about the impact of maternal depression on children's health and development is generally low, particularly among husbands, who may not realize how their actions can induce toxic stress in children, severely affecting their development.

Towards the end of the podcast, the necessity of integrating mental health into the healthcare curriculum was discussed as a critical step towards addressing maternal depression effectively. Dr. Yousafzai called for improved psychiatric care and training for healthcare professionals to identify and manage mental health issues, which would significantly enhance outcomes for mothers and children.

The podcast concluded with a mutual acknowledgment of the importance of continued dialogue and action to address maternal depression, with hopes that the insights shared would lead to enhanced understanding and better support for affected families.

14. Early Detection, Lifelong Protection: Navigating Child Health from Pregnancy to Parenthood

In the 14th episode of the "Early Childhood Development" podcast series, we were joined by Major General (Retired) Professor Dr. Salman Ali, an esteemed pediatrician with a wealth of experience. Dr. Salman, who has served as Principal at the Army Medical College, Rawalpindi, and Fazaya Medical College, Islamabad, as well as in key advisory roles for the Pakistan Armed Forces, shares his expertise on the importance of child health, starting from pregnancy through to early childhood.

Ms. Khadija begins the discussion by introducing Dr. Salman and thanking him for joining the podcast. She frames the topic by focusing on the early detection of health issues in children and pregnant women, asking Dr. Salman to elaborate on what the key "danger signs" are during pregnancy and early childhood that parents and healthcare providers should be aware of. Dr. Salman starts the conversation by emphasizing that child development starts from conception, not birth. He explains that the intrauterine period, from conception until birth, is the most critical phase of growth in a human's life. He highlights how this period involves rapid development, where a single cell develops into a fully formed baby in just 40 weeks. This growth is influenced by multiple factors, such as maternal health, nutrition, and environmental conditions, all of which can have long-lasting effects on the child. Ms. Khadija then asks Dr. Salman to explain the role of maternal health in the child's development, particularly how maternal conditions can affect the baby. Dr. Salman responds by stressing that the mother's health directly impacts the baby's



development. He mentions that conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, and anemia in the mother can hinder the baby's growth in the womb. He advocates for routine antenatal check-ups and screenings to detect any health issues early, which is essential for both the mother's and baby's well-being.

Expanding on the topic of prenatal care, Ms. Khadija asks about the screening methods available for expecting mothers, particularly in Pakistan, and how these screenings help detect developmental issues. Dr. Salman explains that advanced countries offer a wide range of prenatal screenings, including tests for genetic conditions like Down syndrome, which can be detected in the first trimester. While some of these tests are available in Pakistan, he notes that samples often need to be sent abroad for more specialized genetic testing. He emphasizes that early detection allows for timely intervention, which can prevent complications during pregnancy and childbirth.

Ms. Khadija raises an important question regarding the healthcare challenges in rural areas, where medical facilities are often lacking. Dr. Salman acknowledges the difficulty but stresses the importance of training traditional birth attendants in rural regions to recognize early danger signs during pregnancy. He explains that these attendants can serve as the first line of defense in identifying high-risk pregnancies and referring women to higher-level healthcare facilities. This, he says, is crucial for reducing maternal and infant mortality rates in underserved areas.

Continuing the conversation, Ms. Khadija asks Dr. Salman to elaborate on specific "danger signs" during pregnancy that should prompt immediate medical attention. Dr. Salman explains that signs such as reduced fetal movement, abnormal fetal growth, or issues like preeclampsia (high blood pressure) are critical warning signals. These require prompt medical intervention to prevent complications for both the mother and the child. Shifting the focus to postnatal care, Ms. Khadija inquires about the practices to ensure newborns are cared for correctly and what harmful traditional practices should be avoided. Dr. Salman responds by emphasizing the importance of proper handling of the newborn right after birth. He explains that outdated practices, such as holding a baby upside down or slapping them to initiate breathing, should be avoided. Instead, newborns should be placed immediately in their mother's arms for skin-to-skin contact, which is essential for comfort, bonding, and proper breathing.

The conversation then turns to the importance of breastfeeding in a child's early development. Ms. Khadija asks Dr. Salman to explain the role of breastfeeding in brain development and overall health. Dr. Salman underscores that breastfeeding is vital for a baby's brain development, particularly during the first six months of life. He highlights that breast milk contains essential nutrients that are irreplaceable by formula, and the first feed, colostrum, is especially rich in antibodies and nutrients crucial for the baby's growth. He emphasizes that exclusive



breastfeeding should continue for the first six months to ensure optimal physical and cognitive development.

Ms. Khadija follows up by asking how parents can ensure their child is meeting developmental milestones and how they can provide early stimulation to aid in their child's growth. Dr. Salman explains that early stimulation—talking to the baby, engaging in physical touch, and responding to their cues—is critical for healthy brain development. He emphasizes that children are highly receptive to their surroundings, even while in the womb, and that early interaction helps build essential cognitive and social skills. He also encourages parents to monitor their child's growth using developmental charts and to seek medical advice if any delays in reaching milestones are observed.

In the latter part of the discussion, Ms. Khadija raises the issue of parental education, pointing out the lack of awareness among parents about how to nurture their children properly. Dr. Salman agrees and stresses the need for a structured system to educate parents about child-rearing, both at the community level and through formal programmes. He explains that reducing violence against children and fostering positive reinforcement from a young age are critical for raising emotionally healthy individuals.

In his closing remarks, Dr. Salman reiterates the importance of early detection, maternal health, and nurturing environments in ensuring a child's lifelong well-being. He emphasizes that to create a compassionate, healthy society, we must start by caring for mothers and fostering empathy and love in the earliest stages of childhood development.

The podcast concludes with Ms. Khadija thanking Dr. Salman for his valuable insights, expressing hope that this discussion will help parents, educators, and caregivers in their efforts to support children's health and development.

15. Managing Screen Time in Early Childhood: The Impact and Alternatives

In the latest episode of the Early Childhood Development podcast, Ms. Khadija welcomes Dr. Semra, a clinical psychologist, to discuss the increasingly concerning effects of screen time on young children's development. As digital devices become a central part of modern life, this episode delves into how excessive screen exposure is altering children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Dr. Semra provides expert insights on managing screen time and offers alternative strategies to foster healthier growth in children.



Ms. Khadija begins by introducing the topic and pointing out the challenges parents face as screens become an integral part of their children's daily routines. She highlights the concern that children are often absorbed by digital devices, which affects their development. Ms. Khadija asks Dr. Semra to explain the harmful effects of excessive screen time on children and suggest alternative ways for parents to manage it.

Dr. Semra explains that while technology has introduced many positive advancements, excessive screen time negatively affects children's routines, learning abilities, physical activity, and social interactions. She stresses that digital device, when used without moderation, can become addictive, leading to deeper problems such as withdrawal symptoms when children are cut off from their screens. She points out that short-form content, such as Reels or short videos, has shortened children's attention spans, making it harder for them to focus on tasks, which is also forcing schools to adapt teaching methods to maintain engagement.

The conversation then moves to the neurological effects of screen time. Dr. Semra discusses how digital content releases neurotransmitters that provide children with a rush of pleasure, similar to the effects of substance addiction. This makes it difficult for children to transition away from screens without displaying emotional or behavioral problems. She also explains how assistive technology, while useful in some cases, can contribute to social isolation by reducing the need for face-to-face interactions, which are crucial for developing social skills.

Ms. Khadija further explores the physical impact of screen time, particularly how it affects children's eating habits and overall health. She asks Dr. Semra about the common practice of using screens during mealtimes to distract children. Dr. Semra responds by emphasizing that this practice disconnects children from the eating experience, affecting both their physical health and their relationship with food. This, combined with prolonged physical inactivity, can lead to childhood obesity and poor motor skills.

Another key concern is the effect of screen time on speech development. Dr. Semra explains that while children exposed to screens may learn a wide vocabulary, they often struggle with real-world communication. Excessive screen use can delay speech development and affect the child's ability to engage in meaningful conversations, as they tend to mimic the one-sided dialogues from cartoons or videos rather than learning to interact with others in a natural, conversational way.

To counteract these issues, Dr. Semra emphasizes the importance of balance and suggests screen-free activities that promote physical, cognitive, and social development. She advises parents to introduce more physical play, reading, interactive family activities, and other engaging



alternatives to screen time. Establishing "tech-free zones" in the home, such as during meals or in certain rooms, can help foster a healthier environment for both children and parents.

In response to a question from Ms. Khadija about managing screen time in schools, Dr. Semra stresses the importance of a balanced approach to incorporating technology into education. While audio-visual aids can be beneficial, schools should also emphasize traditional forms of learning, such as reading books and engaging in physical activities. Teachers can help manage children's screen use by keeping lessons interactive without overly relying on digital tools.

As the discussion wraps up, Ms. Khadija asks about the role of policymakers in managing screen time for children. Dr. Semra calls for a collaborative approach between parents, educators, and policymakers to create structured environments where screen time is limited and balanced with other activities. She emphasizes that digital tools should be used in moderation and that more focus should be placed on educating both parents and children about the healthy use of technology.

The episode concludes with a reminder from Dr. Semra that while screen time is an inevitable part of modern life, it is possible to find a healthy balance. By setting clear boundaries and encouraging meaningful, screen-free interactions, parents can help their children develop into well-rounded, socially adept individuals who thrive in both the digital and real world.

16. Nurturing Future Generations: The Power of Maternal Nutrition

In this informative podcast, Ms. Khadija hosts two experts from Nutrition International, Mr. Dawar Adnan Shams, National Manager, and Mr. Shahid Fazal, Technical Advisor. They engage in a deep conversation on the significance of maternal nutrition and its pivotal role in early childhood development, while exploring how malnutrition impacts not only individual families but also the nation.

The episode begins with Ms. Khadija welcoming both guests and introducing the crucial topic of maternal nutrition. She sets the context by explaining the link between maternal health and early childhood development (ECD), emphasizing how malnutrition during pregnancy has both immediate and long-term consequences on the child's physical and cognitive growth.

Ms. Khadija's first question to Mr. Dawar is about the work Nutrition International has been doing in Pakistan. Mr. Dawar shares that Nutrition International, formerly known as the Micronutrient Initiative, has been working for 25 years in Pakistan. Their programmes focus on delivering



proven nutrition interventions, particularly in maternal and newborn health, adolescent nutrition, and micronutrient supplementation. One of their recent initiatives, the "Rishma" campaign, targets maternal nutrition and aims to improve nutrition indicators in collaboration with the government of Pakistan. Mr. Dawar explains that their collaboration with the government is nationwide, offering technical assistance to align with existing policies and strategies, thus strengthening maternal and child health programmes.

Ms. Khadija then turns to Mr. Shahid and asks him to shed light on the current state of maternal nutrition in Pakistan and its broader implications. Mr. Shahid reveals the alarming statistics from the National Nutrition Survey of 2018, where nearly 50% of women in Pakistan are anemic and 15% of mothers of childbearing age are malnourished. He explains that these conditions lead to negative birth outcomes, such as low birth weight and premature births, which result in long-term consequences for children's immune systems and cognitive abilities. He stresses that these are irreversible conditions, underlining the importance of addressing malnutrition at the right time, particularly during pregnancy and adolescence, to ensure better health for future generations.

Ms. Khadija probes further, asking how maternal malnutrition directly impacts children's development and what measures should be taken to address this issue early on. Mr. Shahid responds by emphasizing that addressing adolescent nutrition is crucial because these young girls are the future mothers of the next generation. He advocates for early intervention to break the cycle of malnutrition, ensuring that adolescent girls and pregnant women receive adequate nutrition and care to avoid complications during pregnancy.

Another critical point raised by Ms. Khadija is the connection between maternal nutrition and mental health. She asks Mr. Shahid if malnutrition in mothers is linked to mental health issues and how that affects children. Mr. Shahid explains that malnutrition can indeed lead to mental health problems, both pre- and post-pregnancy. He elaborates that mental health issues in mothers negatively affect the cognitive and emotional development of their children. Proper nutrition, however, helps mothers maintain better mental health, leading to improved outcomes for their children.

Shifting the conversation to the economic impacts of malnutrition, Ms. Khadija asks Mr. Dawar to discuss how maternal malnutrition affects the nation's progress. Mr. Dawar explains that maternal malnutrition places a heavy burden on Pakistan's economy, costing the country an estimated \$7.6 billion annually, which amounts to 3% of the GDP. He breaks down these costs, pointing out that they include healthcare expenses, mortality, and loss of future productivity due to compromised cognitive development in children. The conversation highlights that investing in



maternal health is not just a healthcare issue but also an economic imperative for the country's progress.

Ms. Khadija asks what the primary causes of malnutrition are and where the gaps lie in addressing this issue. Mr. Dawar responds that malnutrition stems from several factors, including poverty, lack of healthcare access, and insufficient nutrition education at the community level. He stresses that while strategies have been developed, the key challenge remains in the implementation of these policies due to resource constraints and limited public awareness.

Ms. Khadija then inquires about successful interventions that have been implemented to combat malnutrition. Mr. Dawar highlights two successful initiatives: the weekly iron-folic acid supplementation programme for adolescent girls, which has been effective in reducing anemia, and the fortification of wheat flour and oil with essential micronutrients. These interventions are helping to combat widespread deficiencies in the population and have already shown promising results.

Finally, Ms. Khadija asks how Nutrition International engages with mothers and their families to ensure they receive the necessary education and services. Mr. Dawar explains their approach, which includes behavior change communication and interpersonal engagement. Through one-on-one counseling sessions, community meetings, and educational campaigns, Nutrition International reaches out to mothers, their families, and healthcare providers. They use media campaigns and educational materials to promote maternal nutrition and antenatal care, ensuring that families are aware of the importance of proper nutrition during pregnancy.

The episode concludes with a call to action from Ms. Khadija, urging all stakeholders—government bodies, civil society, and families—to prioritize maternal nutrition as a key factor in shaping the future of Pakistan. Both Mr. Dawar and Mr. Shahid reinforce the importance of early intervention and comprehensive education in breaking the cycle of poor maternal and child health, ensuring a healthier, more prosperous future for the country.

This discussion underscores the interconnectedness of maternal health, early childhood development, and the economic well-being of Pakistan. Through collaborative efforts between the government, development partners, and civil society, the cycle of malnutrition can be broken, leading to long-lasting benefits for generations to come.



17. Understanding Autism: Embracing Inclusivity, Empowering Parents

In this enlightening episode of our Early Childhood Development podcast, we are joined by Ms. Sadia Atif, a clinical psychologist and director at Step Ahead, an inclusive programme dedicated to supporting children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Ms. Sadia shares her insights on the critical role of inclusion and the collective responsibility of parents, educators, and the government in supporting children with autism to live fulfilling lives.

Ms. Khadija begins the discussion by welcoming Ms. Sadia and asking her to share her journey and the work she does at Step Ahead. Ms. Sadia explains that her motivation comes from a personal connection—her brother's autism—which has deeply influenced her professional path. She emphasizes that autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder with varying symptoms that can include challenges in communication, social interaction, and repetitive behaviors, often noticeable by around 24 months of age.

Discussing the challenges faced by children with autism in mainstream educational settings, Ms. Sadia highlights that many schools and teachers lack adequate training to support these children. They are often misunderstood and excluded from regular activities, which underscores the need for environments that foster inclusion rather than segregation.

In response to Ms. Khadija's question about the signs that parents and teachers should look for to identify autism, Ms. Sadia advises that early signs often involve delays in communication and social interactions, such as failing to respond to their name or make eye contact. She stresses the importance of early intervention and active engagement through play to help develop necessary social and communication skills.

Ms. Sadia also discusses the need for continuous training for both parents and teachers. She explains that while autism has no cure, appropriate educational and behavioral interventions can significantly help children develop essential life skills. She highlights the importance of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that caters to the unique needs of each child, including therapies for speech, behavior, and motor skills. Addressing the role of government in supporting children with autism, Ms. Sadia notes the lack of implementation of inclusive education policies and calls for better training for teachers and facilities that accommodate the needs of autistic children in public spaces.

Concluding the conversation, Ms. Sadia stresses the importance of creating an inclusive environment that recognizes the potential of children with autism. She emphasizes that positive reinforcement and societal acceptance can make a significant difference in the lives of these children.



This episode serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of inclusion and the collective effort required to support children with autism, ensuring they have the opportunities and support needed to reach their full potential.

18. **Mastering Social Behaviour: Transforming Habits into Skills**

In this enlightening episode of our podcast series on Early Childhood Development, we are joined by Ms. Humaira Latif, an expert in curriculum development and early education. The discussion focuses on the critical role of behavioral skills in child development, emphasizing the need to teach and nurture these skills from a young age.

Ms. Humaira begins by explaining the importance of behavioral skills like empathy, respect for elders, and emotional regulation, which should be cultivated early in life. These skills are foundational for the overall development of a child and are essential for their success both as individuals and in societal interactions.

Ms. Khadija addresses the topic of social behavior by discussing the discrepancy often seen between societal advice and personal practice, which can have a detrimental effect on children. She explores the need for consistent behavior and practicing what we preach to ensure children learn positive behaviors effectively. Ms. Humaira echoes this sentiment, emphasizing that while academic achievement is celebrated, often at the expense of social-emotional skills, a balanced approach that also nurtures behavior is crucial for holistic development. She highlights that the early years, including the first 1000 days of a child's life, are vital for shaping behavior and personality through both parental influence and educational systems.

The discussion also touches on the importance of role modeling. Ms. Humaira stresses that children learn behaviors from their parents, teachers, and the surrounding community, making it essential for adults to demonstrate the behaviors they wish to instill in their children. The conversation delves into the challenges of modern parenting and education systems that overly focus on grades. Ms. Humaira points out that this can lead to a lack of empathy and social skills among children, who may excel academically but struggle in social settings.

Furthermore, Ms. Humaira discusses the impact of digitalization on children's behavior, noting the increasing isolation and lack of empathy among youth. She talks about the need for parents to engage children in activities that teach values like sharing and responsibility from a young age.

Ms. Khadija queries about the educational system's role in balancing academic success with behavioral development. Ms. Humaira advocates for an educational reform that integrates



social-emotional learning into the curriculum, ensuring that children are not only academically proficient but also capable of handling emotional and social challenges.

The episode concludes with a powerful message from Ms. Humaira on the need for parents and educators to collaborate in fostering environments that support both intellectual and emotional growth. She urges a shift towards a more balanced approach that values behavioral skills alongside academic achievements, preparing children for a well-rounded future.

Pre-Conference Symposiums: Promoting Positive Parenting

Overview

Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC) in collaboration with the Pakistan Pediatric Association (PPA), UNICEF, Protection and Help of Children Against Abuse and Neglect (PAHCHAAN) has been organizing pre-conference symposium since 2021. The 3rd symposium in this series was held under the title of **‘Positive Parenting - Introduction of Nurturing Care Framework’** on September 15th, 2023, at the Royal Swiss Hotel Lahore. UNICEF Provincial Office, Punjab extended technical and financial support to organize the workshop. This event was part of the 8th Symposium of the Pakistan Pediatric Association and the 13th National Child Rights Conference. The workshop aimed at fostering discussion among key partners about positive parenting and child development, exploring the significance of positive parenting practices versus Adverse Childhood Experiences. Moreover, it provided an opportunity for the participants to understand the UNICEF-developed **‘Parenting Package - Key Family Care Practices’** and to identify avenues to integrate key messages of this parenting package into governmental and non-governmental sectors.

Objectives

The symposium aimed to:

1. Foster discussions among stakeholders about positive parenting and its impact on child development.
2. Explore the significance of positive parenting practices versus Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in ensuring child protection.
3. Understand and promote the Nurturing Care Framework and Key Family Care Practices (KFCEPs) within governmental and non-governmental sectors.



Keynote Presentations

1. **Professor Junaid Rasheed** focused on sub-optimal infant and child feeding practices, advocating for improved nutritional strategies and the importance of responsive feeding. He presented alarming data on nutritional deficits in Pakistani children and stressed the need for systemic change in feeding practices and public health policy.
2. **Dr. Uzma Bukhari** from UNICEF discussed the stages of early childhood development and the critical role of the first 1000 days, linking it to Key Family Care Practices. She underscored the necessity of integrated and multisectoral efforts to ensure holistic child development, emphasizing the impact of environmental factors, responsive caregiving, and nutrition.
3. **Mr. Raqib Rahim** emphasized the often-overlooked role of fathers in child development, advocating for greater inclusivity in parenting roles. He highlighted cultural barriers and stressed the importance of societal change to support father involvement in parenting practices.

Panel Discussions

- **Dr. Hina Azhar** discussed the importance of recognizing and addressing developmental delays early. She detailed strategies for capacity building among parents and healthcare providers and introduced the Shamaq Development Screening Tool designed for quick assessment of children's developmental progress.
- **Dr. Asif Hashmi** explored the profound impact of adverse childhood experiences versus positive parenting on child development and well-being. He discussed the biological, neurological, and social consequences of adverse experiences and emphasized the importance of preventive measures and supportive parenting practices.
- **Professor Ayeshah Mehnaz** addressed the evolution of parenting practices and the need for modern strategies that reflect current societal challenges. She promoted a holistic approach to parenting ('tarbiyah') that incorporates ethics, moral values, and comprehensive child protection strategies.
- **Dr. Kishwar Inam** raised concerns about the negative impacts of excessive screen time on child development, especially on brain development and social skills. She provided guidelines for appropriate screen time and emphasized the importance of parental involvement and monitoring.



Conclusions and Recommendations

The symposium concluded with reflections and closing remarks by **Dr. Naeem Zafar**, who stressed the necessity of cultural adaptation in parenting practices and highlighted the critical role of nurturing in the growth and development of children. The discussion underscored the essential role of parental responsibility from conception onward, recognizing the fundamental need for education and support for prospective parents to fully understand and embrace their roles.

4th Pre-conference Symposium - Promoting Positive Parenting – Introduction to Nurturing Care Framework

Overview

Following the objectives mentioned above the fourth in a series of pre-conference symposiums organized by the Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC), in collaboration with Pakistan Pediatric Association (PPA), UNICEF, SUN Secretariat, Nutrition Section, Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, WHO, and Protection & Help of Children Against Abuse and Neglect (PAHCHAAN), was held on November 14, 2023, at Rawalpindi Medical University. The symposium gathered over 300 participants, including doctors, nurses, early childhood development (ECD) practitioners, and other professionals, to discuss strategies for promoting positive parenting and addressing the adverse experiences that affect children's development.

Symposium Proceedings

Opening Address by Prof. Rai M Asghar: Prof. Asghar, Dean of Pediatrics at Rawalpindi Medical University, opened the symposium by emphasizing the importance of a focused approach to early childhood development and child protection. He highlighted the university's initiatives, such as the integration of a Child Rights Curriculum in the Diploma in Child Health Programme and the establishment of the First Child Protection Unit.

Ms. Khadija Khan's Presentation: Ms. Khan, representing PAFEC, discussed the collaborative efforts to promote holistic ECD through positive parenting. She outlined the symposium's key pillars, which included knowledge sharing, stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and the institutionalization of positive parenting practices.

Prof. Muhammad Umer's Address: The Vice Chancellor of Rawalpindi Medical University discussed the university's commitment to promoting positive parenting and ECD, thanking the organizers for choosing the venue and supporting the symposium's goals.



Ms. Mehak Naeem's Insights: Ms. Naeem focused on the significance of tailored parenting programs that equip parents with necessary skills for effective parenting. She emphasized the importance of strong support systems and parental responsibility in fostering a nurturing environment for children.

Dr. Muhammad Zeeshan's Presentation on Modern Parenting: Dr. Zeeshan, from Rutgers University, presented on the challenges and strategies of modern parenting. He highlighted the importance of understanding children's perspectives, the impact of parents' past experiences on their parenting style and provided actionable advice on nurturing happy and well-adjusted children.

Dr. Uzma Qudsia on ECD Global Initiatives: Representing WHO, Dr. Qudsia spoke about significant global initiatives and research impacting ECD. She detailed the Nurturing Care Framework's implementation strategies and the role of the health sector in advancing ECD goals.

Ms. Arooj Malik on Playful Parenting: Ms. Malik highlighted the critical role of play in children's psychological and emotional development. She detailed various types of play and their benefits, advocating for play as a fundamental right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Dr. Naeem Zafar on Adverse Childhood Experiences: Dr. Zafar discussed the profound impact of ACEs on both child and adult well-being, using poignant stories and research to highlight the need for preventive parenting practices and supportive interventions.

Closing Reflections

The event concluded with a dynamic Q&A session, where attendees were eager to learn more about implementing the discussed parenting strategies in practical settings. The symposium successfully fostered a collaborative environment focused on advancing positive parenting and nurturing care frameworks, setting a strong foundation for future initiatives in child welfare.

Training of Trainers on Early Childhood Development in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On behalf of Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood Ms. Khadija Khan, the CEO provided technical support to UNICEF for conducting a series of trainings for government officials on Early Childhood Development in 2023. Below is a summary of the training courses held at different locations:



Background

UNICEF, in collaboration with the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (GKP), is implementing an Integrated Services Delivery (ISD) project across 48 union councils in the districts of Bannu, DI Khan, South Waziristan, and North Waziristan in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These districts are among the 25 Very High-Risk areas, with 26% of the target population being children under 5 years old. They are considered key reservoirs for sustaining the transmission of Wild Polio Virus 1 (WPV1), necessitating heightened focus and intervention.

The districts face significant public health challenges, including high levels of stunting among children and limited access to essential child health and nutrition services. Acute malnutrition rates are alarmingly high, reaching up to 24% in North and South Waziristan, well above the emergency threshold of 15%. This situation increases the risk of childhood mortality by 10%, making children more vulnerable to infections, including polio. Malnutrition compromises immune responses, and in combination with infections, exacerbates both morbidity and mortality.

In 2022, after a 15-month period without any reported cases of WPV1, Pakistan saw a sharp rise in cases, from 2 in April to 20 by September. All cases were reported from southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with 17 in North Waziristan, 2 in Lakki Marwat, and 1 in South Waziristan. Additionally, Bannu district reported positive environmental samples for WPV1 in April 2022, and in February 2023, an environmental surveillance sample from DI Khan tested positive. The first confirmed case of WPV1 in 2023 was also reported in Bannu, underscoring the need for continued improvements in health service delivery.

The ISD project aims to reach zero-dose children through integrated service delivery, addressing the health, nutrition, WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), and social behavior change needs of the population. This is in support of polio eradication initiatives, with a focus on essential immunization services to reduce immunity gaps and build community trust.

Introduction to Training of Trainers in Nithiagali – Murree

To achieve the ISD project's objectives, a series of activities has been designed by UNICEF in collaboration with the KP government, one of the most critical being capacity building in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and introduction of Key Family Care Practices (KFCP) for stakeholders at the provincial level, within the targeted districts and union councils. The primary goal is to enhance the understanding of families, caregivers, and communities regarding ECD and



nurturing care, contributing to child survival, development, and protection through positive parenting.

The training covers 22 key family care practices, spanning from conception to age 8. These practices include health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, safe water, hygiene and sanitation, child protection, early learning, and nurturing care. Moreover, it includes a comprehensive orientation on ECD, brain development in early years and the significance of 1st 1000days. A three-day training for this purpose was designed and conducted from September 4 to 6, 2023, in Nathiagali – Muree for this purpose. A total of 35 individuals attended the training, including 17 participants from the districts of Bannu, South Waziristan, Upper and Lower South Waziristan, Tank, and DI Khan, along with nine UNICEF staff members and nine representatives from the Government Health Department, KPK. The training was a success due to the active participation of attendees, who engaged in discussions, shared real-life examples, and took part in group activities, presentations, and role plays. The master trainers facilitated the sessions interactively, fostering a conducive environment for learning and inquiry and sharing knowledge based on latest research on ECD around the globe.

Training of Trainers in Punjab

Another three-day provincial training was held in Lahore from 24th - 26th October 2023, in collaboration with Health Services Punjab to train master trainers on Early Childhood Development, Nurturing Care Framework and Key Family Care Practices. The training aimed to equip healthcare providers, especially doctors, nurses, child psychologists, and nutritionists. The training provided the latest research-based knowledge in ECD and models for promoting holistic ECD in the country, fostering a network of trained professionals who could disseminate their knowledge, creating a ripple effect in the field of ECD.

The master trainers represented various academic institutions such as the University of Child Health Sciences Lahore, Children Hospital Lahore, Children Hospital and Institute of Child Health, Multan, Agriculture University Faisalabad, Sir Gangaram Hospital, Lahore and Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore and many more.



Training on Early Childhood Development and Nurturing Care Framework in Gilgit

The third training in this series held in Gilgit from 8 – 10th May 2024. The three-day training was organized by the Planning and Development Department of Gilgit-Baltistan, Scaling up Nutrition, and UNICEF on Early Childhood Development, Nurturing Care Framework and Key Family Care Practices - Parenting Package in Gilgit. Members of the ECD Provincial and District Technical Working Groups, key stakeholders from provincial government line departments, policymakers, civil society representatives, development partners, academia, and ECD professionals working in the private sector participated in the training. The participants actively participated in the various activities carried out during the three days and expressed their appreciation and commitment to replicate the training in their respective areas.

Presentation at Annual General Meeting of SUNCSA

Ms. Khadija Khan, CEO of PAFEC participated in the Annual General Meeting of SUNCSA, held on November 23, 2023, in Islamabad. She delivered a presentation focusing on Early Childhood Development (ECD) and the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF). In her insightful presentation, she highlighted the crucial role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in promoting ECD in the country, which generated interest among the members to know more about ECD and its benefits.

Over 200 CSOs/CSA Pakistan members and representatives from Government, UN, INGOs and Academia attended the event. This event aimed at sharing SUNCSA progress and accomplishments, strengthening the technical capacities of SUNCSA members on the latest nutrition & ECD information, and discussing nutrition-sensitive best practices models/programmes and how such programmes can be designed and implemented.

Training Session for the World Association for Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

Ms. Khadija Khan conducted a 3-hour long session for the World Association for Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) on the 'Learner Centered Approach'. The objective of the session was to introduce different learning approaches to the Guides so that they can enhance their learning, using a variety of approaches including the integration of technology in learning. The session focused on the prerequisites for learning, key principles of learning, foundational learning,



different styles and strategies of learning, learners' attributes, and the key features of the learner-centered approach. It was an interactive session, and the participants were given enough time to understand the concepts in depth by asking questions and taking an active part in the discussions. The guides also expressed their commitment to arranging such sessions in their areas for junior guides.

Orientation Session for Programme Heads and Officers of National Commission for Human Development

The CEO of Pakistan Alliance for Early Childhood (PAFEC) conducted an orientation session for Programme Heads and Officers of the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD). The Director General, all the Directors, HoDs and Programme ADs participated in the session. After giving an introduction about PAFEC's vision, mission and objectives, Ms. Khadija started her presentation by explaining holistic ECD, which refers to children's physical, cognitive, social, emotional and language development. She then explained the following three distinct phases of ECD; conception – birth, birth – 3years(1000days+), 3-8years(pre-school, pre-primary years). A child develops optimally during these phases, especially when the speed of brain development is at its peak, she said. However, she said that children need to be nurtured with responsive care, nourishing nutrition, good health, quality early learning opportunities, and safety & protection. These are all dimensions that scientific research has found to be crucial for laying sound foundations for future adult health and productivity.

Ms. Khan further shed light on how the brain forms connections at an astonishing rate—more than a million per second! The first 1000 days, she emphasized, are crucial for laying the foundation for a child's entire life. She explained the concept of 'sensitive periods' of brain development. These are specific times when critical functions of a child develop at a speed that never repeats at any stage of that child's later life. For this to happen the child needs a stimulating and nurturing environment. The early years, she stressed, set the stage for a child's lifelong health and happiness. To keep things straightforward, Ms. Khan highlighted three key things that make a big difference in a child's life: good experiences, supportive families, and quality learning. These, she said, are like the key ingredients for a strong foundation.

Concluding her presentation Ms. Khadija touched upon the different challenges faced by children in Pakistan including their safety and protection, poor health facilities, inadequate nutrition, limited or no early learning opportunities, and lack of awareness about responsive



caregiving. Since ECD requires inputs from different sectors, she urged everyone to join hands and collaborate to support children in an integrated way.

Director General NCHD Mr. Nasir-ud-Din Mashhood Ahmad appreciated the efforts of PAFEC and thanked Ms. Khadija Khan for presenting an informative session on Early Childhood Development. The Director General instructed to prepare doable plan for disseminating the concept of ECD to Field officers and Community.

Dissemination of Key Insights from the 4th International Conference on ECD

Overview

Following the successful completion of the 4th International Conference on Early Childhood Development on February 22nd and 23rd, 2023, at Allama Iqbal Open University in Islamabad, PAFEC took on the significant task of compiling and distributing the conference report. This report captures the rich discussions and innovative ideas shared under the theme “Nurturing for Transforming Lives: The Power of Early Childhood Development.”

Compilation and Distribution

The report was thoroughly compiled to include insights from over 350 participants, including policymakers, ECD professionals, and representatives from civil society and international organizations. The final document provides a complete overview of the conference proceedings, featuring keynotes, panel discussions, workshops, and the Early Childhood Development Expo. PAFEC ensured that the insights gained were shared beyond the conference attendees, reaching over 100 key partners across government, academia, non-profit sectors, and international agencies. This broad dissemination aims to encourage continuous dialogue, influence policymaking, and drive integrated actions for early childhood development across various sectors.

Distributing the conference report has played a crucial role in maintaining the focus on early childhood development. It serves as a resource for ongoing education, advocacy, and policy development, helping to ensure that the progress made at the conference leads to real actions and collaborations that benefit children worldwide.



Enhancing Knowledge and Expertise: PAFEC Team's Participation in Global Webinars

Overview

Throughout the year, the PAFEC team actively participated in a series of enlightening webinars hosted by renowned global and regional organizations. These sessions were integral in enhancing understanding of current trends and innovative practices within the fields of parenting, child and adolescent health, and early childhood development.

Key Sessions Attended

- **Global Initiative to Support Parents:** The webinar focused on "Enhancing Disability Inclusivity in Parenting Interventions," offering insights into inclusive practices that accommodate children with disabilities in parenting programs.
- **World Health Organization (WHO):** The session on "Regional Dissemination of the Lancet Series on Optimising Child and Adolescent Health and Development" provided our team with valuable data and strategies to optimize health outcomes in these age groups.
- **Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN):** Two significant webinars included "Revolutionising Early Childhood Education Globally" which highlighted innovative educational practices worldwide, and "Fatherhood and Male Engagement," where Dr. Seema Lasi and her team from AKU-HDP presented their pioneering parenting model.
- **Participatory Development Action Program (PODA) - Rural Women Leaders Network:** Focused on the development issues relevant to women's leadership and empowerment in rural contexts.

Impact on PAFEC

These webinars have been instrumental in broadening the perspective, deepening our scientific understanding, and inspiring the integration of research-backed strategies into our programmes. The knowledge acquired has been crucial in designing culturally and contextually relevant programmes that are tailored to meet the specific needs of the communities we serve.



ECDAN x Harvard: Masterclass Series in Applying Systems Thinking to Early Childhood Development

Certificate Achievement

Ms. Khadija Khan has successfully completed the ECDAN Masterclass Series in Systems Thinking for Early Childhood Development. This series, supported by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, involved 14 sessions led by over 20 global experts, focusing on enhancing ECD systems.

Impact and Application

The Masterclass was designed to deepen the understanding of systems thinking in the context of ECD. Participants, including Ms. Khadija, explored a variety of frameworks, methodologies, and tools through presentations and dialogues tailored to enhance ECD systems. This engagement has equipped our CEO with advanced strategies to drive systemic changes within PAFEC's initiatives, ensuring that our efforts are both innovative and sustainable.

The knowledge gained from this series is set to play a crucial role in strengthening the early childhood development system in Pakistan. Ms. Khan's enhanced expertise will guide PAFEC in crafting programmes that are not only responsive to the needs of children but also aligned with global best practices in ECD.