

**Letter to the
Editor**

Rights of Children in Pakistan: Where we stand

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Author's Contribution

¹ Conception of study

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Human Rights is the entitlement of the individuals, groups or organization to perform an act in a civil society within the boundaries of legal, moral and social norms. In case of children, who cannot comprehend their rights; their rights should be recognized by the stake holders in order to have its legal and moral existence. This stake holders are the state, parents and all individuals in the society.

A nurturing environment is essential for rearing a child.

The United Nation (UN) after deliberating on the issue of children rights, reached a unanimous decision on Nov. 20, 1989 and adopted the resolution on Children Rights in (UN CRC). In 1990 at the world summit all the member states signed and ratified the UNCRC (1). Pakistan was among the countries too.

UN-CRC contains 54 articles which deals with four major areas of children development. These are survival, development, protection and participation.¹ Survival rights include the right to live a healthy life, registration at birth, entitlement to have a personal identity etc. Development rights include provision of education, health, adequate standard of living with social security. Children also have the rights to indulge in leisure and recreation. Children protection from abuse and neglect, sexual abuse and exploitation, child trafficking and abduction, drug abuse and protection from armed conflict, neglect, torture and provision of justice to juveniles are the fundamental rights of children. Children has the right to express their

opinion and thoughts and freedom of participation in healthy activities associations. They also are entitled to protection of privacy and access to information.

By ratifying the UNCRC, Pakistan is accountable to its action towards children.

According to UN-CRC children need access to health care, education, decent shelter and above all protection from all kinds of maltreatment.

Have we provided these basic rights to our children?

Let us look at the state of children in Pakistan. Almost fifty percent of our population comprises of children, 60% or more if we include adolescents population. Of 1000 new born, almost 100 do not reach their 5th birthday.² Nearly 40% do not survive the first month of life. Most children's basic medical and nutritional needs are not met. The common killer diseases are pneumonia, diarrhea, measles, malaria, typhoid etc. Most can be easily prevented by timely immunization. Unfortunately the immunization coverage in children are still low. Malnutrition still accounts for the major underlying cause of deaths in children.^{2,3} Micronutrient deficiencies like iron, zinc etc. are affecting over 8 million children.^{4,5,6} On the other hand obesity among children are on the rise among city dwellers mainly due to calories rich nonnutritive foods easily available on the street with no warning attached to it. This is alarming in obesity in children. Children are increase at risk of developing diseases like diabetes, hypertension and other related disorders with associated mental stress and diseases.

The situation related to education is not very encouraging, nearly 23 million children are out of school, and more than 65% are girls. Rural areas have very low literacy rate (38%) In Sindh 58% and in Baluchistan 78% girls have received no formal education and have never been to school. Early marriages interrupts girls education, 21% of girls are married at a very early age. Existing gender inequality has affected girls more than boys. The literacy rate of youth is less than 58%. Most children are deprived of schooling, girls far outnumber males. There are 8 to 19 million children involved as laborers in the country reports⁷, 40 million according to the reports of Federal Bureau of Child Protection^{8,9} is a very big issues, protecting children from maltreatment, abuse and violence is still an unfamiliar concept. Every year more than 3000 children are raped or assaulted. There is an 11% rise in the reported cases of child abuse every year.¹⁰

These children belongs to all socio-economic class. There is preceded rise in violence against children in the last few decades.

Children are not only subjected to extreme violence but are increasingly being used as sex workers, drugs and arms peddlers, child soldiers and are forced to be involved in other similar abominable crime.

Not only are the children are victims of men created disasters but children are worst affected by natural disasters too, like flood, earthquake, rains, draught, pandemic and other similar natural disasters. Natural disasters not only increases the risk of communicable diseases and malnutrition in children but as a result children fall victims of neglect, abuse, violence, child trafficking, child marriages, illegal adoption and economic exploitation.

In Pakistan Child protection system though exists in theory, need implementation in letter and spirit. There is complete lack of state of art procedures and mechanism for child protection in worst circumstances. Children need to be given priority as they are the most vulnerable set of at risk population. A properly structured disaster management and risk reduction strategy for children is imperative and should be the number one priority for the Government of Pakistan.

Why we have failed to protect our children, why children rights have never been implemented in true letter and spirit in Pakistan. Why we as a nation we are unable to keep our promises to Children? A question we must ask ourselves.

"The stakes are high. It is not just the health and well-being of children as they grow up into adults but

more than this, the future of the society which the children will construct out of their childhood experiences." (Hobbs, Hanks & Wynne, 1993

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