

Addressing Childhood Blindness in Bangladesh : A Call for Action

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Childhood blindness is a significant public health concern in Bangladesh, where the prevalence of this condition continues to cast a shadow over the lives of many young individuals and their families. According to epidemiological data, the prevalence of childhood blindness in Bangladesh is alarmingly high, with 6.3 out of every 10,000 children affected [by AHME Hussain, 2019] but currently, it is around 6. Furthermore, the rate of unilateral (one-eye) blindness stands at 4.8 per 10,000 children, emphasizing the urgent need for attention and action to address this issue

The high prevalence of childhood blindness in Bangladesh is a matter of grave concern. It represents not only a personal tragedy for affected children but also a substantial burden on the country's healthcare system and society as a whole. Blindness can have severe and long-lasting impacts on a child's quality of life, educational prospects, and social integration. Therefore, it is imperative that we understand the root causes of this issue and take decisive steps to prevent and manage childhood blindness.

Epidemiological data clearly point to congenital problems as the leading causes of childhood blindness in Bangladesh. These problems often include conditions such as congenital cataracts, glaucoma, retinopathy of prematurity (ROP), and congenital infections like rubella. Many of these conditions are preventable or manageable through timely interventions. For instance, congenital cataracts can be surgically removed, restoring vision in many cases. Similarly, ROP can be managed with appropriate neonatal care, and vaccination against rubella can prevent congenital infections.

To address childhood blindness effectively, Bangladesh must adopt a multifaceted approach:

- 1. Early Screening and Diagnosis:** Implementing a nationwide program for early screening and diagnosis of congenital eye conditions is essential. This requires training healthcare providers, especially in rural areas, to recognize signs of childhood blindness and refer affected children to specialized eye care centers.
- 2. Improved Access to Healthcare Services:** Ensuring that all children have access to affordable and quality healthcare services, including eye care, is crucial. This involves expanding the reach of healthcare facilities to underserved areas and subsidizing the cost of treatments for economically disadvantaged families.
- 3. Public Awareness and Education:** Raising awareness about the importance of prenatal care, vaccination, and regular eye check-ups during infancy is essential. Parents and caregivers should be educated about the signs of childhood blindness and the importance of seeking medical attention promptly.

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- 4. Capacity Building:** Investing in training for eye care professionals and ophthalmologists, especially in the field of pediatric ophthalmology, can significantly enhance the diagnosis and treatment of childhood blindness.
- 5. Research and Data Collection:** Continuous research and data collection are vital to understanding the evolving landscape of childhood blindness in Bangladesh. This information can guide policy development and resource allocation.
- 6. Integration of Services:** Coordinating efforts between different sectors of administrative supporting sector and healthcare sector, including maternal and child health services, can help identify and address congenital eye problems early in a child's life.

The battle against childhood blindness in Bangladesh is a challenging one, but it is a fight worth undertaking. By prioritizing the prevention, early diagnosis, and management of congenital eye conditions, we can significantly reduce the prevalence of childhood blindness and provide a brighter future for countless young lives. It is a moral imperative that we join forces, as a nation, to ensure that every child in Bangladesh has the opportunity to see the world with their own eyes, free from the shadows of preventable blindness.