

## Health achievements

In child health also Sri Lanka has done well, except nutrition which is puzzling, as most of the other health indicators show steady progress. The under-five mortality rate (U5MR) has declined from 21 in 1990 to 10 per 1000 live births in 2012 and the infant mortality rate has declined from 18 in 1990 to 8 per 1000 live births in 2012.

Almost 99 percent of the children have received all the basic vaccinations, which includes BCG, measles, three doses each of DPT and polio vaccine, before reaching the age of two years. More than 98 percent of the births are attended by a skilled health worker, of which more than 74 percent are doctors. These achievements are mainly due to free education and health services provided by the state for more than five to six decades.

However, undernutrition of children under five years is still a major concern. According to the latest estimates of the Family Health Bureau (FHB), 17 percent of children under five years are still underweight. Statistics show that undernutrition starts to increase after the period of exclusive breastfeeding, especially after the age of around seven months, with the commencement of complementary feeding. The problem of undernutrition needs continuous attention of the health authorities, as it is a major health concern for children.

## Protection

It is the responsibility of all adults to protect the children from any form of violence or maltreatment. Child maltreatment includes: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. Parents need to take special care to ensure that their children are protected from any form of violence or abuse. Media reports show that in Sri Lanka, the number of reported cases of sexual abuse of children is increasing, which needs the attention of everyone, especially that of the parents, to take the necessary preventive measures to protect their children. It is always better to take suitable measures in advance to prevent any form of abuse, rather than taking action after the abuse.

The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) was established in 1998 for the prevention of child abuse and the protection and treatment of children who are victims of such abuse. It is also mandatory for the NCPA to co-ordinate and monitor all actions taken by the law enforcement authorities, regarding all forms of child abuse. Any parent could contact the authority if they feel that any of their children are being abused or has been abused by anyone. Children themselves could also contact the authority, if they need to talk to any official, regarding any form of abuse they may be experiencing.

## What can we do?

Despite the satisfactory level of most indicators compared to many developing countries, Sri Lanka still has a lot more to do to ensure that no child is left behind. Despite the existence of children's rights, some children suffer from poverty, abuse, neglect, unequal access to quality education, etc. As the convention on the Rights of the Child is addressed to governments, it is the responsibility of all governments to ensure that their rights are protected.

However, the task of protecting the children's rights can only become a reality when they are respected by everyone – parents and other member of the family, teachers and others working in schools, those working in other public and private institutions providing services to children, law enforcement authorities and all levels of government administration. As such, it is the responsibility of

everyone to ensure that the rights of every child are protected, as the children are our future.

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