

## JOINT EVENT

Global Public Health Congress

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**Barriers to neonatal hearing screening in Pakistan**

**Statement of the Problem:** Hearing Impairment (HI) in children is globally prevalent and Neonatal Hearing Screening (NHS) programs detect Hearing Loss (HL) in newborns at earliest stage for early intervention leading towards rehabilitation. Such NHS programs have been established in developed countries since decades and implemented in many developing countries except a few like Pakistan. The purpose of this study is to explore priority accorded to NHS, an invisible disability, at health policy level and to identify existing health structure and to determine barriers towards NHS in Pakistan.

**Method:** An exploratory descriptive qualitative study design conducted with in depth interviews using interview guides from policy makers and hospital administrators in public hospitals in Islamabad. Data recorded was transcribed, thematic analyses drawn manually and verified with help of two separate coders.

**Findings:** Barriers that emerged were lack of policies and scientific focus during policy formation, legislation and fragile health system at federal and provincial level, lack of advocacy and public awareness, not sensational issue hence not focus of media, lack of technical advice by WHO and international donor agencies, poor health infrastructure, burden on tertiary care, deliveries at homes especially in rural areas with assistance of Trained Birth Attendants (TBA), inadequate fiscal resources, lack of referral and integrated approach at intra departmental levels.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that barriers to NHS are lack of financial resources towards the health sector and scarcity of research and reliable data affects the initiation of NHS programs. It is recommended to initiate NHS in Pakistan without any further delay. State should devise policies and provide financial support and resources for NHS. A phased NHS program is need of time which can subsequently be converted into a full-fledged national hearing screening project for entire population.

**Biography**

Nazia Mumtaz has completed her PhD in Rehabilitation Sciences from Isra University, Islamabad, Pakistan. She has been teaching and supervising researches for MS Speech Language Pathology, MS Hearing Sciences. She is also an Associate Editor for the *International Journal of Rehabilitation Sciences* and Reviewer for the *Journal of Riphah College of Rehabilitation Sciences*. She is a Consultant SLP at Al-Nafees Medical Hospital, Islamabad. She is also a member of WFNR and Analyst in National newspapers. She has completed the Fellowship in Clinical & Research Neuro Rehabilitation, Department of Rehabilitation Medicine from Seoul National University, Bundang Hospital, Korea. She has also completed her Certification from World Federation for Neuro Rehabilitation Certification in Neurological Rehabilitation, Seoul National University Bundang Hospital, Korea. She has completed her MS/MPHil in Speech Pathology. She is currently working as a HOD of Speech Language Therapy at Al-Nafees Hospital and Member Technical Advisory Group for National Neonatal Hearing Screening Program, Ministry of Health Services & Regulations and Government of Pakistan. She has participated in many international conferences.

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