

Dear Colleagues,

Greetings from the Editor's Desk...!!

Birth defects are third common cause of death in children under 5. So much so that 1 out of every 33 babies born is with a defect. We do understand that not all birth defects are life-threatening nor can be prevented, but a lot of conscious effort can be made to create awareness and actions implemented to prevent, detect and manage them. Every child is precious, and the journey of health begins inside the mother's womb, attention to optimizing preconception parameters in both parents will also help in the long run. In spite of increasing awareness, still, the contribution of birth defects to the cause of under-5 deaths is constantly increasing. It grew from 4% to 11% in our region between the years 2000 and 2021 and every single day 300 under-5 children die for the same reason. All these have profound impact not only on individuals but also families, friends and the healthcare system. Many of these are preventable, as we understand environmental factors and genetics play a major role in their etiology.



With growing exposure to environmental pollutants, deteriorating lifestyles and low socioeconomic status have a lot of effects on pregnant women and their fetuses. We need an integrated approach to formulate interventions for prevention and optimize early detection and management of birth defects.

There is a growing awareness and coverage of mother and child immunization, and the food fortification has also improved the preconception status of women. But what has really not been controlled across the region is our environmental pollutants, exposure to potentially harmful medicines, X-rays, smoking and tobacco products, alcohol and drug abuse, which really needs an acceleration in our awareness programs along with rehabilitation and support system. Apart from screening in pregnancy, newborn screening is another very big area, which should be in our national programs. I would really urge everyone who is reading this editorial to integrate prevention, early detection and management of birth defects in their day-to-day practice to align with "Survive, thrive and transform" agenda of global strategy for women, children and adolescent health.

This issue brings to you some very interesting regional research and articles and I am thankful to all the contributors for sharing their publication with us.

Looking forward to many more inputs from each and every one from you. The next regional conference of SAFOG along with AFOG will be held in Dubai from 20 to 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2025.

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