

Arab Regional Conference on the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

19-22 November 2017

**From Legislation to Implementation
Dubai, United Arab Emirates**

Hayat Sende Post-Event Report

On behalf of Hayat Sende Association, Sultan ERBAŞ as Networks and Platforms Unit Coordinator attend into the 5th ARABCAN (Arab Regional Conference on the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect) 2017 Conference held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates between 19-22 November 2017.

The conference is organized with the hosting of Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWAC) and International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN). The theme of the conference is decided as Safe Childhood: From Legislation to Implementation. Under the main theme of it, five sub-themes are discussed with many presentations and speeches given by various civil society professional, practitioners, policy-makers and decision-makers.

Those sub themes are

- Child Protection Legislation and Procedures,
- Best Practices for Child Protection in Arab Region,
- Training and Capacity Building in the Workforce,
- Intervention in Child Maltreatment,
- Data Collection and Research in the Field of Child Maltreatment.

The conference has also a pre-conference programme including Masterclass and Youth Forum on 18th November and Countries in Transition, Working Group on Child Maltreatment Data Collection and Working Group on Child Death Review on 19th November. On the other hand, those sessions are not included in the regular registration of the ARABCAN Conference.

1st Day of the Conference

Following the welcoming speech of Dr. Tufail Muhammad as the President-elect of ISPCAN, Susan Bissell from UNICEF, made a keynote speech on the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. She emphasizes that aim is not reducing but ending the violence. Ms. Bissell underlines how critical is the situation by a statistic that **every five minutes a**

child died because of a violent death. Also she mentions that **one of every five boys from residential care suffers from physical violence.**

For her, initiative should be taken by governments, UN Agencies, NGOs, faith groups, private sector, young people and children themselves. Overall aim is uniting all actors to keep children in safe and secure in home, in school or in the community in order to make society safer for children to make policies children-centered, gender-responsive, inclusive result-oriented and evidence-based.

She also talks about Partnership to End Violence Against Children and its targets including building a political will, tackling violence etc. For those targets, they collaborate with 14 path-finder countries but she mentions that **there is no countries from the Arab region among the path-finder countries.**

One of her focus points is violence around the child cannot be separated from violence against child since **there is a direct relation between violence against women and violence against child.**

After Susan Bissell, Dr. Maha Al Muneef made a key note speech regarding Child Maltreatment: Where are We, and Where We Are Going? Mr. Al Muneef starts its speech with the information that **all Arab countries ratified the United Nations Convention on the Right of Child (UNCRC).**

She also mentions some **common challenges that the whole Arab region suffers.** Those can be listed as following:

- armed conflicts
- tradition, bad/mal-practices (forced marriages, female genital mutilation)
- poverty and economical gap
- human trafficking
- size of abuse and violence

She finds the integrated statistic very significant because there is statistics from different sectors such as health, education but integrated statistics.

Al Muneef states that **one of four people faces violence in their childhood.** She also underlines the correlation between violence and change in the functions of the brain and its impact on DNA. While she talks about impacts of violence on brain development, it is emphasized that **“prevention is better than cure”.** She focuses on prevention programmes such as;

- support families and parents
- support child to live in a healthy environment
- change attitude, criterias, bad experiences and traditions
- enhance policies and legislations
- collect data

- conduct scientific activities and researches

As an example to the changing attitude, in 1979 corporal punishment is banned in Sweden with a movement of “[NO HIT ZONE](#)”

As a good example, **all Arab countries have helpline for children.**

She mentions the situation on children with epidemics by highlighting limited intervention and no coordination between social-health or judicial sectors.

During the Discussion Panel on Child Protection Legislations and Procedures in the Region with the UAE Minister of Education and the UAE Minister of Community Development

They discussed on whether the law and legislation are enough on child protection and they mention that nobody will agree on that it's enough. They said that they want those legislations to be contemporary and updated. Also they take attention to the preserving of child, facilitating a free life, protecting child from abuse and neglect, best interest of a child children during disasters and the situation of homeless child and children with special needs.

Wadeema Law (Child Law named after an Emirati girl tortured to death by her father) is accepted as basis and simple transparent steps to increase awareness on rights of child.

Also, bullying take a significant place in their speech including cyber bullying as a new phenomena. They mention the vitality of prevention programmes and reporting on child abuse.

Workshops

- **Intervention; Child and Family Training (childandfamilytraining.org.uk)**

It is talked about how each child assumes parenting differently according to child's context so family context should be understood at first.

- **Child Safeguard Policy (Maryam Ehsani/Keeping Children Safe)**

It is emphasized that each NGO or all other sectors conducting activities with children should have a safeguarding policy to protect children at first place with the idea of do not harm principle.

- **Violence-Free Parenting from Save the Children (Jumanah Zabaneh)**

She take attention to the fact that **violence at home is most of the time is the first violence that children have faced in their life.** She mentions the linkage between violence against women and violence against children. Their approach is gender sensitive as well because **boys and girls are abused or are exposed to violence differently.** REAL

Fathers and Children and Youth Resilience programs are two examples that Save the Children apply within the Parenting Programme.

➤ **INSPIRE (Hala Saqr and Sabine Rakotomalala/End Violence Against Children)**

It is bringing different sectors together and focusing on solutions more. It takes 2 years to prepare those 7 strategies under [INSPIRE](#) against violence against children in 6 UN languages. For those who finds it too theoretical, they are preparing a handbook to implement by all actors and sectors.

2nd Day of the Conference

Her Highness Sayyida Basma Al Said shared her experiences on Child Protection. She mentions the project of [I Am Child](#) and Omman's hotline. They worked with adults who face abuse their childhood.

After Al Said, Bernard Gerbaka on behalf of ISPCAN shared Child Protection in Arab Region: Past, Present to Future speech. He underlines the importance of more reporting and precautions, partnership with regional bodies and implementation linkage with legislation.

He also states: **“Any investment on prevention is saving the money of the society.”**

Human Trafficking (Dr. Ahmad Youssef Al Mansuri)

He made important points regarding human trafficking. Those can be listed as following;

- 185 countries have laws against human trafficking
- Victims are coming from 137 countries so no country is safe from human trafficking.
- Countries can be home, transit or destination.
- There is no opposition against Palermo Protocol in 2000
- There is also no human rights perspective
- One of the big challenge is decision-makers draw their policies according to the numbers. Because, victims are most of the time afraid to apply authorities when they are exposed to any kind of abuse or right violations since those human trafficking victims are deported and sent to their home country as a solution.
- On the other hand those victims have right to work and their desire is sending money back to their family and no body wants to be sent from the destination country at the end.

Workshops

➤ **The Resilience of Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon (Micheal Maragel/Himaya)**

Micheal talks about the importance of the periods of **pre-migration**;

- According to the study on Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey (Özer, Sirin and Oppedal 2013), 79% experienced the loss of a family member
- 60% witnessed physical violence or shooting
- 30% were themselves victims of physical violence or shooting
- 44% had experienced at least five of those events
- 19% had experienced seven or more

the period of **migration** (Fazel and Stein 2002, OCHA 2015)

- dangerous
- often internally displaced before arriving in Lebanon

and **post-migration** (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP 2016)

- 71% of the households living below the poverty line
- 97% of the population rely on harmful coping strategies
 - eating fewer meals per day
 - involving teenage boys in the worst forms of child labor
 - early marriages for girls
 - 48% of primary school age children and 84 % teenagers are out of school
- 42% are living in substandard conditions
- 29% of households have no members with legal residency
- 65% of refugee children are victims of violent discipline methods disabilities (GoL and UN2017)
- Distressed parents lead to distressed children

He also focuses on **education as a source of resilience for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon** as below;

- Positive home, school and community experiences protect refugee children from psychological distress
- Children living in apartments had significant lower levels of PTSD symptoms
- Wishing to pursue Education indicates Resilience

As a result, to reduce the impact of war trauma and displacement in Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Those should be ensured;

- Safe and secure living conditions
- Supporting and promoting positive parental behavior
- Trauma-sensitive psychosocial support building on resilience framework
- Access to school and link with larger community

➤ **Developing a Fostering Service for Unaccompanied and Separated Syrian Refugee Children: A new feature for social work practice in Jordan (Dr. Aisha Hutchinson/ University of Bedfordshire,UK/ aisha.hutchinson@beds.ac.uk)**

Dr. Hutchinson talks about current situation as below;

- At the end of 2016, the number of registered Syrian refugees is 655,833 (UNHCR and UNDP,2017)
- There is a Jordan Response Plan for the Syrian Crisis
- 52% of registered Syrian refugees are children (Protection Working Group 2016)
- In 2015, UNHCR recorded that there were 4640 unaccompanied and separated Syrian minors in Jordan
- UASC Task Force was established, Standard Operating Procedures were developed around Best Interest Assessment and Best Interest Determination (Child Protection Working Group 2015)

About developing a Fostering Service;

- UNHCR, UNICEF, Save the Children and inter-agency guidance strongly advocates for the alternative care of children to be primarily based in families
- Fostering is appropriate within a collective culture
- Specific challenges to identify appropriate Syrian families to provide safe foster care

Dr. Aisha Hutchinson also talks about how social workers can be empowered with some policy recommendations such as;

- Developing and restructuring services to enhance the case management role
- Infusing case management with social work skills
- Development of professional training of social workers in Jordan and across the region
- Adapting case management approach to the Jordanian context

➤ **The Growing Crisis of Internally Displaced Migrant Street Children: The Challenges for Child Protection (Dr. Rajeev Seth)**

Dr. Seth shares main challenges for protection of internally displaced migrant children. He mentions that children are most vulnerable, the first to be affected by war, conflict, climate change and poverty and migrant children are subjected to extreme forms of abuse, deprivation and poverty. He also takes attention on that there is no universal principle of addressing Internally Displaced People. Dr. Seth shared that keeping families together is very critical to protect children. Other strategic initiatives would be registration, collective effort for right to education, health, shelter, nutrition, addressing the root cause of migrations and preventing discrimination and marginalization

➤ **Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitations and Sexual Abuse (Dr. Mark Peter Capaldi/ ECPAT)**

[The Luxembourg Guidelines](#) is prepared as a result of works of the Interagency Working Group with involvement of 18 international child protection actors and 3 academic observers after 18 months of negotiation, research and analysis. It is adopted in three languages so far; English, Spanish and French.

Main issues behind why it is needed are

- Lack of agreement regarding the meaning of terms or definitions (Ex. Sexual Exploitation/Sexual Abuse)
- Undermining or trivialising the issue (Ex. Child Sex Tourism/Child Pornography)
- Harming or Stigmatising the child (Ex. Child Prostitution /Child Prostitute)

There is an ongoing process of translating and adapting the Guidelines into other languages (German, Mandarin, Hindi and Turkish)

➤ **Violence Against Children of the World: Burden, Consequences and Recommendations for Action (Dr. Shanti Raman)**

Dr. Raman starts her speech with some facts including

- In 2012, homicide took the lives of about 95,000 children and adolescent-almost 1 in 5 of all homicide victims that year
- Physical punishment- 6 in 10 children regularly subjected to physical punishment by carers
- Bullying- 1 in 3 students between the ages of 13 and 15 regularly experience bullying
- Forced sex- 120 million girls < 20 years (about 1 in 10) have been subjected to forced sexual intercourse or other sexual acts at some point in their lives)
- Intimate partner violence (IPV) - 1 in 3 adolescent girls worldwide have been the victims of emotional, physical or sexual violence committed by their intimate partners

Main topics and environments that violence takes place are listed as schools: bullying, corporal punishment, institutional violence, child labour, armed conflict, some practices based on tradition, culture, religion or superstition.

For institutional violence in particular;

- Millions of children spend varying lengths of time in institutional care
- Many reasons for children to get into institutions
 - Physical and mental health conditions that require institutional care
 - Juvenile justice
 - Militaries that conscript children
 - Children displaced by war and conflict
- Many profound short and long term negative effects of institutional care

➤ **Play Therapy (Dr. Hind Al Rustamani/ Zayed University Student Counseling Center)**

Play therapy is a structured, theoretically based approach to therapy that builds on the normal communicative and learning processes of children (Carmichael, 2006). Carl Rogers develops person-centered therapy, which emphasizes the importance of genuineness, trust, and acceptance in the therapeutic relationship. Therapists strategically utilize play therapy to help children express what is troubling them when they do not have the verbal language to express their thoughts and feelings (Gil, 1991)

Dr. AlRustamani mentions about two approaches; directive (when children are more aware) and non-directive (children are low-conscious).

She shares also 8 main principles as following;

- First contact is so important
- Accept the child as he/she is
- Relationship how she express herself
- More insight
- Deep respect
- No direct the child's actions (do not say that what happened then?)
- Do not hurry the therapy
- Limitations

She also tries to explain some observations with some examples and cases. For example, the child choose the Russian doll and insistently asking that is there any smaller? (She may try to express his/her feelings on "younger one, sibling or an identity situation) or children may ask after they finished their drawing, "Do you like what I made?" It may be related to permission, attention he/she is seeking or throwing sands from sand box can be understood as a measuring boundaries and rules or attention.

Also she shares the guidelines;

- Be sensitive to the child
- Trust child's ability to respond
- Do not answer questions that haven't been asked
- Limits are not needed until they are needed
- Make statements and don't ask questions when you already know the answer
- Look for the firsts (dramatic changes)
- Toys and material should be selected, not collected
- You cannot accept another person's difficulties until you are able to accept yours
- How therapist feels the child is more important than what therapist knows

Also, how to be mindful;

- Plan ahead
- Set safety limits (do not assure that they know)
- Do not take things personally
- You are dealing with a child not adult
- Putting child first

- Need to know yourself
- Seek supervision and training when needed
- Need to work on your own personal health
- Spend time on your own inner child
- Know the toys
- Being authentic with children
- Imagination

3rd Day of the Conference

The last day of the conference starts with Jenny Gray's speech on "Working with Governments to Set Up Effective Child Protection Systems". During her speak, she shares summary of findings from World Perspective Survey including;

- Low-income countries face huge challenges, comprising children's wellbeing and protection
- Middle- and high-income countries also need to invest much more
- Relatively minor differences regarding laws and policies, but low-income countries had less developed systems (World Perspectives on Child Abuse 2016)

As a cost of child maltreatment, estimated that the annual costs of physical, sexual and psychological violence against children(measured indirectly as losses in future productivity) are anywhere between 2 percent and 5 percent of global GDP. Using sensitivity analysis, in the highest scenario, they can go up to 8 percent, or about US\$ 7 trillion. (Muggah and Alvarado, 2016)

As the economy of early intervention, just as violence costs,so prevention pays. According to the European Union (EU), **every euro invested in preventing violence, produces a social return to 87 Euro**. In a time of austerity, investing in violence prevention is a question of good economics. (Marta Santos Pals, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, 2013)

She also emphasizes the vitality of inter-agency/multi diciplanary working in child protection. She states that failures in the child protection system often related to poor collaborative working.

She also focuses on key challenges for a system working to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect as following;

- Recognising that it is a system
- Having collaborative working between organisations and professionals recognized- at all levels- as being cost effective and supporting good a-outcomes for children
- Supporting agencies and staff to work together and recognise its value even in a difficult fiscal climate
- Ensuring that the services provided are the most effective for the nature of problems being addressed

- Moving beyond parameters of success defined by sector to those defined by improved outcomes for the child and the protection of their rights
- **Dialogue to Enable Care Reform in Arab and Islamic Countries (Sultan Erbaş, Dr. El Badry)**

On 22nd November, under the topic of Prevention Strategy, Hayat Sende made the presentation on “Dialogue to Enable Care Reform in Arab and Islamic Countries” with Dr. Abla El Badry from Hope Village Society. Moderation is held by Dr. Moha Al Muneef and the presentation took 15 minutes. During the presentation, Ms. Erbaş and Dr. El Badry shares the project ideas on promoting and supporting Alternative Care in Islamic Context under the Family for Every Child Network.

Other relevant topics from the same session are “Supporting Faith Leaders to Become Child Protection Champions” by Maryam Ehsani, Child Protection in Lebanon: A Resilience and Socio-Ecological Framework” by Lama Yazbec.

Conclusion

For the region, the ARABCAN Conference is a very good opportunity to share each country's' achievements and experiences in the field of protection against violence. The program of the conference is designed to be a multi-track and to provide an environment to gather different actors from different disciplines. The approach is also aimed to be in an interdisciplinary manner with an emphasis on prevention strategies, legislations and capacity building.

With the conference, Hayat Sende heard about the organisation of ARAB-SPCAN and its work on prevention of child abuse and neglect. With getting in contact with those local branches of ISPCAN, Hayat Sende and other Islamic countries can reach its statistics and relevant scientific research results. For long term, increasing awareness on care models, institutionalization and its relations with the risk of abuse and violence as a subtheme in their conferences. As an observation while topics are many and selected interdisciplinary, among 15 symposiums/sessions for 3 days there're only few presentations covering alternative care models.