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Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for
all at all ages

Statement submitted by the International Federation for Family Development, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Ensuring healthy lives through parenting support

As the global community seeks to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, the role of family, mental health, and child well-being becomes increasingly significant. Parenting support and mental health interventions are pivotal in shaping individuals, families, and ultimately, population outcomes. A healthy and well-supported population starts with children raised in nurturing environments, where their physical, mental, and emotional well-being is prioritized.

This statement explores the interconnections between parenting support, mental health, and child well-being, offering evidence-based best practices and innovative approaches. It highlights the transformative impact of these areas on population health, demographic trends, and human capital development.

The role of parenting support in population health

Parenting as a foundational determinant of population well-being

Parenting plays a central role in shaping the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development of children, which in turn determine the health, productivity, and stability of societies. From prenatal care to adolescence, the quality of parenting impacts critical developmental outcomes such as brain development, resilience, and lifelong health trajectories.

Research underscores the profound impact of early childhood experiences on long-term outcomes, including education, economic productivity, and mental health. Support for parents, especially during the first 1,000 days of a child's life, has been shown to improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities. For instance, parenting programs that promote responsive caregiving, positive discipline, and early stimulation have significantly improved children's cognitive and emotional development.

Challenges faced by parents

Modern families face myriad challenges, including economic instability, work-life imbalances, and lack of access to healthcare and social services. These factors can hinder parents' ability to provide optimal care. Single-parent households, families in conflict-affected regions, and marginalized communities face disproportionate hardships that exacerbate health disparities.

Supporting parents through education, access to health services, and economic assistance is essential for addressing these challenges. Evidence from countries that have implemented family-focused policies – such as paid parental leave, childcare subsidies, and community-based parenting support – demonstrates the significant impact of such interventions on population well-being.

Best practices in parenting support

Parenting education programs: Initiatives such as the “Family enrichment courses of IFFD” have been effective in equipping parents with knowledge and skills to promote early childhood development. These programs integrate health, nutrition, and psychosocial support.

Home visiting programs: Evidence-based models, such as the Nurse-Family Partnership like in Torun or Veneto Region, provide direct support to parents, especially first-time mothers, to improve child and maternal health outcomes.

Community-based approaches: Community parenting groups and peer support networks create shared spaces for learning, emotional support, and empowerment, particularly in low-resource settings.

Mental health: A crucial element of well-being for all

The intergenerational impact of mental health

Mental health is a cornerstone of individual and population well-being. Untreated mental health issues in parents can adversely affect parenting quality and children’s development. Parental mental health challenges – such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse – are strongly associated with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which can lead to lifelong health and behavioral problems.

Conversely, children’s mental health significantly affects their educational achievement, social relationships, and future productivity. Poor mental health outcomes in childhood often extend into adulthood, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social inequality. Addressing mental health within the family context is therefore critical to breaking these cycles and improving long-term population health.

Barriers to mental health support

Despite the importance of mental health, stigma, lack of resources, and inadequate integration of mental health services into primary care continue to limit access. Globally, mental health services are underfunded, with many low- and middle-income countries allocating less than 1 per cent of their health budgets to this area.

Best practices in mental health interventions

Integration into primary care: The integration of mental health services into primary healthcare systems ensures accessible, affordable, and community-based care. Programs like “Friendship Bench” in Zimbabwe have successfully trained community health workers to provide mental health support.

Digital health innovations: Telehealth and digital platforms are increasingly being used to expand access to mental health care. Mobile apps and online counseling services, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, have proven effective in addressing mental health needs.

Family-based interventions: Programs that simultaneously address the mental health needs of parents and children, such as multi-generational therapy, have demonstrated improved outcomes for family dynamics and individual well-being.

Promoting child well-being: Building resilient populations

The importance of child well-being for population development

Children represent the foundation of future societies. Ensuring their physical, emotional, and social well-being is essential for fostering resilient populations and sustainable demographic trends. Child well-being is multidimensional, encompassing health, education, safety, and emotional security.

Investments in child well-being yield high returns, contributing to healthier, more productive adults who can drive economic growth and societal stability. Conversely, neglecting children’s well-being can lead to adverse outcomes, such as chronic illness, poor educational attainment, and increased risk of social exclusion.

Challenges to children's well-being

Millions of children worldwide face challenges such as malnutrition, lack of access to education, exposure to violence, and inadequate healthcare. Climate change, armed conflict, and the global pandemic have further exacerbated vulnerabilities, disproportionately affecting children in low-income and crisis-affected settings.

Best practices for enhancing child well-being

Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs: Holistic ECD programs integrate health, education, nutrition, and protection to support children during critical developmental stages. Initiatives like IFFD's courses and UNICEF's ECD interventions have shown significant improvements in cognitive and social outcomes.

School-based interventions: Schools serve as vital platforms for promoting children's mental and physical health. Programs that include life skills education, mental health awareness, and nutrition services contribute to overall well-being.

Child protection mechanisms: Strengthening child protection systems, including legal frameworks, social services, and community awareness campaigns, is critical for safeguarding children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Population outcomes: A synergistic approach

The interconnection between parenting, mental health, and population health

The interplay between parenting support, mental health, and child well-being has profound implications for population outcomes. Families that receive comprehensive support are better equipped to raise healthy, resilient children, leading to reduced healthcare costs, improved educational attainment, and enhanced economic productivity.

Policies that prioritize family well-being can also influence demographic trends. For instance, supportive family policies are associated with higher fertility rates in countries experiencing population decline, as they reduce the economic and social burdens of child-rearing.

Scaling up proven strategies

To achieve transformative population outcomes, best practices must be scaled up and adapted to diverse cultural, economic, and political contexts. Key strategies include:

Cross-sector collaboration: Governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and families must collaborate to develop integrated solutions that address health, education, and social protection.

Data-driven policies: Robust data collection and analysis are essential for identifying gaps, monitoring progress, and tailoring interventions to meet specific needs.

Sustainable financing and policy design: Increased investment in family and child-focused programs is necessary to achieve long-term impacts. Public-private partnerships and innovative financing mechanisms can mobilize additional resources.

Call to action

Global commitments to parenting, mental health, and child well-being

The Commission on Population and Development must emphasize the importance of these interconnected areas in its recommendations and policy frameworks. Member States are urged to:

Prioritize parenting support: Develop and expand programs that provide parents with the tools, knowledge, and resources to raise healthy children.

Strengthen mental health systems: Integrate mental health into primary care, reduce stigma, and ensure equitable access to services for all individuals, particularly parents and children.

Invest in child well-being: Allocate resources to programs that address the multifaceted needs of children, including education, nutrition, and protection.

International collaboration for sustainable outcomes

Achieving SDG 3 requires a collective effort. Member States, international organizations, and development partners must work together to share knowledge, mobilize resources, and implement evidence-based practices.

By focusing on parenting support, mental health, and child well-being, the global community can ensure healthier lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. This holistic approach will not only enhance individual and family health but also strengthen the foundations of sustainable development, equitable societies, and resilient populations.

Conclusion

The interconnectedness of parenting support, mental health, and child well-being is central to achieving the SDGs. The Commission on Population and Development has a vital role in championing policies and practices that prioritize these areas. By investing in families and children today, we can create a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable world for future generations.
