

Baker Institute expert: Addressing child stunting in Pakistan is critical

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Pakistani Christian children playing cricket on a street in Karachi. Credit: 123RF.com/Rice University

Pakistan's new prime minister, Imran Khan, must be commended for his pledges to reduce child stunting and improve maternal health in the country, according to a global health and human development policy expert at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy. Stunting is impaired growth and development caused by poor nutrition, repeated infection and inadequate psychosocial stimulation.

Farhan Majid, the L.E. and Virginia Simmons Fellow in Health and Technology Policy at the Baker Institute, said that according to recent figures, nearly 44 percent of Pakistani children are stunted, and that according to another estimate Pakistan loses \$7.6 billion, or 3 percent of its GDP, each year due to malnutrition. Majid outlined his insights in a recent op-ed for Pakistan's leading newspaper, *Dawn*, and he is featured in a new short documentary on this issue. He is available to discuss stunting and [maternal health](#) in Pakistan and globally with the news media.

"As a development economist, I have always been

interested in questions like: Why are some individuals and countries poor and unproductive but others rich and productive?" Majid wrote. "My belief is that Pakistan's economy has been left stunted because of neglect of early childhood health and development."

Majid said the first 1,000 days of life, beginning from conception in pregnancy to age 2, are particularly critical for [child health](#) and brain development; IQ is largely developed before age 10. "This is a source of major concern in Pakistan, where even before children are born their fate may be sealed due to neglect of maternal and child health services," he wrote.

According to the World Bank, a 1 percent loss in adult height due to childhood stunting is associated with a 1.4 percent loss in economic productivity. It is estimated that stunted children earn 20 percent less as adults compared to non-stunted individuals, Majid said.

"Some policymakers have traditionally mistaken investments in maternal and child health as an economic burden," he wrote. "They believe that there is a trade-off between what is socially just and what is economically efficient."

Provided by Rice University

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