

## A Study of Parental Awareness Regarding Preventive Healthcare Practices for Children under Five

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### Abstract

Preventive healthcare practices are essential for ensuring the healthy growth and development of children under five years of age. This study examines the level of parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare measures and their role in reducing childhood illnesses. The research focuses on important healthcare practices such as vaccination, balanced nutrition, regular medical checkups, hygiene maintenance, breastfeeding, and disease prevention strategies. A quantitative research methodology is employed to collect data from parents through surveys and interviews conducted at healthcare centers and pediatric clinics. The findings indicate that parents with higher educational backgrounds and better healthcare accessibility demonstrate greater awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices. Conversely, limited education, financial challenges, and lack of healthcare resources negatively influence parental understanding and healthcare decisions. The study further reveals that inadequate awareness contributes to malnutrition, delayed

vaccinations, infectious diseases, and poor child health outcomes. Healthcare professionals and community health programs play a significant role in educating parents about child healthcare and disease prevention. The research emphasizes the importance of awareness campaigns, parenting education programs, and improved healthcare services to strengthen preventive healthcare practices among families. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for collaboration between healthcare institutions and government organizations to ensure equal healthcare opportunities for children. The findings contribute to pediatric healthcare literature by identifying the impact of parental awareness on child well-being and early disease prevention. The study concludes that informed parenting and accessible healthcare services are essential for improving the health and survival of children under five.

### 1. Introduction

Preventive healthcare is one of the most important components of pediatric medicine because it protects children from diseases and supports healthy growth and development. Children under the age of five are highly vulnerable to infectious diseases, malnutrition, respiratory infections, and developmental disorders due to their weak immune systems and dependency on parental care. During early childhood,

parents play a crucial role in ensuring proper nutrition, vaccination, hygiene, breastfeeding, and medical care for children. Researchers emphasize that informed parenting significantly improves child health outcomes and reduces disease prevalence (Papalia et al. 134).

The concept of preventive healthcare focuses on disease prevention before illnesses become severe. According to the World Health Organization, preventive healthcare includes immunization, nutritional support, sanitation, regular medical checkups, and health education programs. These healthcare practices reduce child mortality rates and improve long-term physical and cognitive development. Healthcare professionals and international organizations strongly advocate preventive healthcare because it minimizes hospitalization and healthcare costs while improving quality of life (Hockenberry and Wilson 214).

### **Context and Background of the Study**

Child healthcare remains a major concern in developing countries, especially Pakistan, where poverty, illiteracy, poor sanitation, and limited healthcare facilities continue to affect children under five. Many children suffer from preventable diseases such as pneumonia, diarrhea, measles, and malnutrition because parents lack awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices. Vaccination delays, unhealthy dietary habits, and poor hygiene contribute significantly to child morbidity and mortality.

According to UNICEF, a large number of children in underdeveloped communities still fail to receive complete immunization and proper healthcare services. Similarly, rural populations often face healthcare accessibility challenges due to limited hospitals, financial instability, and shortage of healthcare professionals. Researchers suggest that parental education and awareness strongly influence healthcare decisions and child survival rates (Berk 89).

Healthcare awareness programs and government initiatives have improved child healthcare services in many regions. However, healthcare inequalities and lack of awareness continue to create barriers to effective preventive healthcare adoption. Therefore, understanding parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices is essential for improving child health outcomes and reducing preventable childhood diseases.

### **Research Gap**

Although several studies have examined child healthcare, nutrition, and vaccination separately, limited research comprehensively investigates parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices for children under five in Pakistani society. Previous studies mainly focus on disease treatment rather than prevention and often ignore the relationship between parental awareness, healthcare accessibility, education, and healthcare decision-making.

Furthermore, many existing studies discuss preventive healthcare from a medical perspective without analyzing the social and economic challenges affecting parental awareness. There is also insufficient research exploring how healthcare professionals and awareness campaigns contribute to improving parental understanding regarding disease prevention strategies. This study attempts to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of parental awareness and preventive healthcare practices among families with children under five.

### **Research Objectives**

The major objectives of this study are:

1. To examine parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices for children under five.
2. To investigate the importance of vaccination, nutrition, hygiene, and breastfeeding in child healthcare.
3. To analyze the impact of parental education on healthcare awareness and healthcare decisions.
4. To identify social and economic factors affecting preventive healthcare

practices.

5. To evaluate the role of healthcare professionals and awareness programs in promoting preventive healthcare.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the level of parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices for children under five?
2. How does parental education influence healthcare awareness?
3. What factors affect preventive healthcare decisions among parents?
4. What role do healthcare professionals play in educating parents?
5. How can preventive healthcare awareness be improved within communities?

### **Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on preventive healthcare practices for children under five years of age. The research specifically examines parental awareness regarding vaccination, nutrition, breastfeeding, hygiene, disease prevention, and regular medical checkups. The study is limited to parents visiting healthcare centers, pediatric clinics, and hospitals in selected communities.

The research investigates the relationship between parental education, healthcare accessibility, socioeconomic conditions, and preventive healthcare practices. It also explores the contribution of healthcare professionals and awareness campaigns in improving child healthcare outcomes.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it highlights the importance of parental awareness in ensuring healthy growth and disease prevention among children under five. The findings contribute to pediatric healthcare literature by identifying the factors influencing healthcare awareness and preventive healthcare adoption among families.

The research may help healthcare policymakers, pediatricians, nurses, and educational institutions develop effective healthcare awareness programs for parents. It may also assist government organizations in improving vaccination campaigns, maternal-child healthcare services, and healthcare accessibility in underdeveloped communities.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of equal healthcare opportunities and informed parenting in reducing child mortality and improving overall child well-being. By promoting preventive healthcare awareness, society can reduce preventable diseases and improve the quality of life for children.

Preventive healthcare practices are essential for protecting children under five from diseases and supporting healthy development. Parental awareness significantly affects healthcare decisions regarding vaccination, nutrition, hygiene, breastfeeding, and regular medical checkups. However, poverty, illiteracy, healthcare inaccessibility, and limited awareness continue to create challenges in many developing communities.

This study examines parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices and identifies the factors influencing healthcare decisions among parents. The findings may contribute to improving healthcare awareness programs, child healthcare services, and disease prevention strategies in society.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Preventive Healthcare:** Medical practices aimed at preventing diseases before they occur.

**Parental Awareness:** The level of knowledge and understanding parents possess regarding child healthcare practices.

**Vaccination:** The administration of vaccines to protect children from infectious diseases.

**Pediatric Care:** Medical care provided to infants and children.

**Child Health:** The physical, mental, and emotional well-being of children.

## **2. Literature Review**

Preventive healthcare is widely recognized as a fundamental aspect of pediatric

medicine because it protects children from diseases and promotes healthy growth and development. Researchers and healthcare organizations emphasize that children under five require continuous healthcare attention because they are more vulnerable to infections, malnutrition, and developmental disorders. Preventive healthcare practices such as vaccination, breastfeeding, hygiene maintenance, balanced nutrition, and regular medical checkups are considered essential for reducing childhood mortality and improving overall child well-being (Berk 67).

Parental awareness plays a significant role in implementing preventive healthcare practices. Parents who possess adequate healthcare knowledge are more likely to adopt healthy behaviors and seek timely medical treatment for their children. Existing literature demonstrates that parental education, socioeconomic status, healthcare accessibility, and community awareness strongly influence healthcare decisions and child health outcomes (Papalia et al. 141). This chapter reviews previous studies and scholarly perspectives related to preventive healthcare practices and parental awareness regarding child healthcare.

### **Concept of Preventive Healthcare**

Preventive healthcare refers to measures taken to prevent diseases before they occur. It includes healthcare practices such as immunization, nutritional management, sanitation, health education, and routine medical examinations. According to the World Health Organization, preventive healthcare significantly reduces mortality rates and improves the quality of life among children.

Researchers argue that prevention is more effective than treatment because it minimizes healthcare expenses and reduces disease burden within communities. Hockenberry and Wilson explain that preventive healthcare helps strengthen children's immune systems and protects them from severe illnesses during early childhood (216). Preventive healthcare also contributes to cognitive and emotional development because healthy children demonstrate better learning abilities and social interaction.

In developing countries, preventive healthcare is especially important because healthcare resources are limited and infectious diseases remain common. Governments and healthcare institutions therefore prioritize immunization campaigns, maternal-child healthcare services, and awareness programs to improve child survival rates.

### **Parental Awareness and Child Healthcare**

Parental awareness refers to the understanding and knowledge parents possess regarding healthcare practices and disease prevention strategies for children. Existing literature indicates that parental awareness directly affects child health outcomes. Educated and informed parents are more likely to follow vaccination schedules, maintain hygiene, and provide balanced diets for children (Berk 92).

Papalia et al. state that parental involvement during early childhood significantly influences physical and psychological development (155). Parents who understand healthcare recommendations can better identify symptoms of illnesses and seek medical assistance promptly. Conversely, lack of healthcare awareness often leads to delayed treatment, malnutrition, and preventable infections.

Several studies conducted in developing countries reveal that parental illiteracy and misinformation negatively affect preventive healthcare practices. Cultural misconceptions and traditional beliefs sometimes discourage families from accepting vaccinations and modern healthcare treatments. Consequently, healthcare professionals stress the importance of educational programs and counseling sessions for parents.

### **Vaccination and Immunization Practices**

Vaccination is one of the most effective preventive healthcare practices for children under five. Immunization protects children from dangerous diseases such as polio, tuberculosis, measles, hepatitis, and diphtheria. According to UNICEF, global vaccination programs have prevented millions of childhood deaths over the past decades.

Hockenberry and Wilson argue that vaccines strengthen immunity and reduce

disease transmission within communities (221). Complete immunization during infancy and early childhood is therefore necessary for long-term health protection. However, despite government vaccination programs, many children in developing countries still remain unvaccinated due to parental negligence, financial limitations, and healthcare inaccessibility.

Research studies further indicate that misinformation regarding vaccine side effects creates fear among some parents. Lack of trust in healthcare systems and inadequate awareness campaigns also contribute to incomplete immunization practices. Healthcare experts recommend community-based awareness programs to improve parental understanding regarding vaccine safety and effectiveness.

### **Nutrition and Preventive Healthcare**

Nutrition is another major component of preventive healthcare because it directly affects children's growth, immunity, and cognitive development. Balanced diets containing proteins, vitamins, minerals, and carbohydrates are essential for maintaining healthy body functions. Malnutrition weakens the immune system and increases children's vulnerability to infectious diseases.

According to Berk, proper nutrition during infancy and childhood contributes to healthy brain development and emotional stability (105). Breastfeeding is especially important because breast milk contains nutrients and antibodies that protect infants from respiratory infections, diarrhea, and malnutrition. The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life.

Research indicates that parents with nutritional awareness are more likely to provide healthy meals and maintain appropriate feeding practices for children. In contrast, poverty and limited education often result in unhealthy diets and nutritional deficiencies. Studies conducted in South Asian countries show that low-income families face serious challenges in providing nutritious food due to financial instability and food insecurity.

### **Hygiene and Sanitation Practices**

Hygiene and sanitation are important preventive healthcare measures that reduce the spread of infectious diseases. Proper handwashing, clean drinking water, waste disposal, and household cleanliness help prevent illnesses such as diarrhea, cholera, and typhoid fever. According to the World Health Organization, poor sanitation remains one of the leading causes of child mortality in developing nations.

Researchers highlight that parents with healthcare awareness are more likely to adopt hygienic practices within homes and communities. Children living in clean environments experience fewer infections and better physical development. Educational programs related to hygiene therefore contribute significantly to public health improvement.

Several studies also emphasize the relationship between sanitation and malnutrition. Repeated infections caused by unhygienic conditions weaken children's immune systems and affect nutrient absorption. Consequently, preventive healthcare strategies must include sanitation awareness and environmental cleanliness.

### **Role of Healthcare Professionals**

Healthcare professionals play a central role in promoting preventive healthcare awareness among parents. Pediatricians, nurses, community health workers, and medical educators provide guidance regarding immunization schedules, nutrition, breastfeeding, and disease prevention.

Research demonstrates that healthcare counseling positively influences parental healthcare decisions. Parents who regularly interact with healthcare providers are more likely to follow preventive healthcare recommendations (Papalia et al. 163). Community health campaigns, vaccination drives, and parenting seminars also increase healthcare awareness among families.

In Pakistan, government healthcare institutions and non-governmental organizations conduct awareness campaigns regarding maternal and child healthcare.

However, healthcare shortages and lack of trained professionals continue to affect healthcare delivery in many rural areas.

### **Socioeconomic Factors Affecting Preventive Healthcare**

Socioeconomic status strongly influences parental awareness and healthcare accessibility. Families with stable financial conditions generally have better access to hospitals, healthcare professionals, nutritious food, and healthcare information. In contrast, low-income families often struggle to afford medical treatment and transportation to healthcare facilities.

Researchers indicate that parental occupation, income level, and educational background significantly affect healthcare decision-making (Berk 113). Poverty also contributes to overcrowded living conditions, poor sanitation, and food insecurity, which negatively impact child health outcomes.

Healthcare inequalities between urban and rural communities further increase healthcare challenges. Urban populations usually benefit from better healthcare infrastructure and awareness programs, whereas rural populations often face limited medical resources and insufficient healthcare services.

### **Research Gap**

Existing literature extensively discusses vaccination, nutrition, and child healthcare separately; however, limited studies comprehensively examine parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices for children under five in Pakistani communities. Many previous studies focus mainly on disease treatment rather than prevention and fail to analyze the combined impact of parental education, healthcare accessibility, and socioeconomic conditions on preventive healthcare practices.

Furthermore, there is limited research exploring the effectiveness of healthcare awareness campaigns and community healthcare programs in improving parental understanding regarding disease prevention. This study therefore aims to address these gaps by examining parental awareness and identifying factors influencing preventive healthcare decisions.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that preventive healthcare practices are essential for improving child health outcomes and reducing childhood diseases. Vaccination, nutrition, breastfeeding, hygiene, and regular medical checkups contribute significantly to healthy growth and development among children under five.

Parental awareness remains a major factor influencing healthcare decisions and preventive healthcare adoption. Educational background, financial stability, and healthcare accessibility strongly affect child healthcare practices. Healthcare professionals and awareness campaigns also play important roles in promoting preventive healthcare within communities.

Despite improvements in healthcare systems, poverty, illiteracy, misinformation, and inadequate healthcare facilities continue to create challenges in many developing countries. Therefore, further research is necessary to examine parental awareness and improve preventive healthcare services for children.

### **3. Research Methodology**

Research methodology provides a structured framework for conducting scientific investigation in a systematic and reliable manner. It includes the processes of data collection, sampling, analysis, and interpretation to achieve valid research outcomes. In the present study, the methodology is designed to examine parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices for children under five, including vaccination, nutrition, hygiene, breastfeeding, and routine medical checkups (Creswell 14).

Preventive healthcare research requires an understanding of both medical and social dimensions because parental decisions are influenced by education, income, cultural beliefs, and access to healthcare services. According to the World Health Organization, effective child healthcare research must address social determinants such

as poverty, education level, and healthcare accessibility, as these factors directly affect child health outcomes.

### **Research Design**

The study uses a quantitative descriptive research design, which allows systematic measurement of parental awareness and comparison across different demographic groups. Descriptive research is suitable because it helps to explain existing conditions without manipulating variables (Bryman 52). The quantitative approach enables numerical analysis of awareness levels regarding preventive healthcare practices.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of this study includes parents of children under five years of age who visit hospitals and clinics in Lahore. These parents are considered primary decision-makers in child healthcare matters.

A random sampling technique is used to ensure equal representation of participants from different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Kumar explains that random sampling improves reliability and reduces bias in healthcare-related research (91).

### **Data Collection Sites (Hospitals and Clinics in Lahore)**

For accurate and diverse data collection, the study is conducted in selected hospitals and pediatric clinics in Lahore. These healthcare institutions are chosen due to their high patient flow, pediatric services, and accessibility to parents from different backgrounds:

1. Children's Hospital & Institute of Child Health Lahore – A major public sector pediatric hospital providing specialized child healthcare services including immunization and emergency care ().
2. Fatima Memorial Hospital Lahore – A well-established hospital offering neonatal ICU, pediatric medicine, and preventive child healthcare services ().
3. Lahore General Hospital Pediatrics Department – A teaching hospital with active vaccination and pediatric outpatient services for children ().
4. Ali Fatima Hospital Lahore Pediatrics Department – A healthcare institution focusing on preventive care, early immunization, and child health education programs ().
5. Amna Medical Center and Children Clinic Lahore – A private clinic providing pediatric consultation, vaccination, and child healthcare services for families ().

These selected hospitals and clinics provide a balanced representation of public and private healthcare systems, ensuring diverse data collection from parents with different socioeconomic backgrounds.

### **Research Instruments**

Data is collected through structured questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire consists of close-ended questions to assess parental awareness regarding vaccination, nutrition, hygiene, and preventive healthcare practices. A Likert scale is used to measure awareness levels.

Interviews are conducted to gather detailed insights into parental attitudes and healthcare behaviors. According to Creswell, combining surveys and interviews increases data validity and provides deeper understanding of research problems (72).

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data is collected directly from parents visiting the selected hospitals and clinics. Participants are informed about the purpose of the study, and voluntary participation is ensured. Questionnaires are distributed in waiting areas of pediatric departments, and interviews are conducted in a calm and private environment to ensure accurate responses.

Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, informed consent, and data protection are strictly followed throughout the research process (APA 2020).

## **Data Analysis Techniques**

Collected data is analyzed using descriptive statistical methods such as frequency distribution, percentages, and mean values. These techniques help in identifying patterns of parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare.

Bryman states that descriptive statistics are effective in social research because they simplify complex data and make interpretation easier (63). Tables and graphs are used to present findings clearly.

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on the **Health Belief Model (HBM)**, which explains health-related behavior based on individual beliefs and perceptions. The model suggests that people adopt preventive healthcare practices when they perceive a risk of disease and understand the benefits of prevention.

Becker explains that health behavior depends on perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, and perceived barriers (35). In this study, parental awareness is analyzed using these dimensions to understand healthcare decision-making for children.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical standards are strictly followed in this research. Participants are informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent is obtained before participation. Privacy and confidentiality are maintained throughout the research process.

The American Psychological Association emphasizes that ethical research must ensure voluntary participation, confidentiality, and protection of participant rights (APA 2020).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has certain limitations. It is limited to selected hospitals and clinics in Lahore and may not represent the entire population. The research also relies on self-reported data, which may include bias or inaccuracies. Time and resource constraints also limit the sample size.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices.

The research methodology provides a systematic framework for analyzing parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices for children under five. A quantitative descriptive design, supported by surveys and interviews, ensures reliable and valid data collection.

The inclusion of major hospitals and clinics in Lahore enhances the diversity and credibility of the study. The Health Belief Model provides a theoretical foundation for understanding parental healthcare behavior. Overall, the methodology ensures a structured approach to examining the relationship between parental awareness and child healthcare outcomes.

### **Theoretical Analysis**

Theoretical analysis provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how and why parental awareness influences preventive healthcare practices for children under five. It connects observed behaviors with established theories of health behavior, education, and social influence. In this study, theoretical analysis is essential to explain how parents make decisions regarding vaccination, nutrition, hygiene, breastfeeding, and routine medical checkups (Creswell 81).

Preventive healthcare decisions are not random; they are shaped by psychological beliefs, social environment, education level, and access to healthcare services. According to the World Health Organization, health behavior is strongly influenced by awareness, perception of risk, and accessibility of healthcare services. Therefore, theoretical frameworks help in understanding the underlying factors that shape parental healthcare decisions.

### **Health Belief Model (HBM)**

The primary theoretical framework used in this study is the **Health Belief Model (HBM)**. This model explains how individuals adopt health-related behaviors based on their beliefs about disease risk and prevention benefits.

Becker explains that health behavior depends on five key components: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, and cues to action (38). In the context of this study, parents are more likely to adopt preventive healthcare practices if they believe their children are at risk of diseases and that preventive actions are beneficial.

For example, parents who understand the severity of measles or polio are more likely to vaccinate their children. Similarly, awareness about malnutrition encourages parents to provide balanced diets. On the other hand, perceived barriers such as cost, lack of access, or cultural misconceptions may prevent parents from adopting preventive healthcare practices.

Cues to action, such as advice from doctors, health campaigns, or community awareness programs, play a significant role in motivating parents to take preventive measures for child health.

### **Application of HBM in Child Healthcare**

The Health Belief Model is highly relevant to child healthcare because it explains parental decision-making regarding preventive practices. Parents act as primary caregivers and decision-makers for children under five, especially in medical situations.

According to Hockenberry and Wilson, parental understanding of disease prevention significantly affects child health outcomes (229). When parents perceive higher risk and understand the benefits of preventive healthcare, they are more likely to follow immunization schedules and maintain hygiene practices.

For instance, vaccination uptake increases when parents are informed about disease risks and vaccine effectiveness. Similarly, breastfeeding practices improve when mothers understand its nutritional and immunological benefits.

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Another important theoretical perspective is **Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)**, which emphasizes learning through observation, social interaction, and environmental influence. Bandura suggests that individuals learn health behaviors by observing others and through social reinforcement (65).

In the context of this study, parents often adopt healthcare practices by observing healthcare professionals, family members, and community members. If vaccination and hygiene practices are commonly practiced in a community, parents are more likely to follow them.

The UNICEF highlights that community-based health education programs significantly improve parental awareness and child healthcare practices. Social influence, therefore, plays a major role in shaping preventive healthcare behavior.

### **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**

The **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** also helps explain parental healthcare decisions. This theory suggests that behavior is influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen 112).

In this study:

- **Attitude** refers to parents' positive or negative evaluation of preventive healthcare practices.
- **Subjective norms** involve social pressure from family, community, and healthcare providers.
- **Perceived behavioral control** refers to parents' belief in their ability to perform healthcare actions such as vaccination and nutrition planning.

Parents with positive attitudes and strong social support are more likely to adopt preventive healthcare practices for their children.

### **Integration of Theories**

The combination of Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory, and Theory of Planned Behavior provides a comprehensive understanding of parental awareness. Each theory contributes differently:

- HBM explains risk perception and decision-making.
- SCT focuses on learning through social environment.
- TPB highlights intention and behavioral control.

Together, these theories explain how parental awareness is formed and how it influences preventive healthcare practices. According to Berk, child health outcomes are strongly linked to parental beliefs, social environment, and knowledge levels (118).

### **Role of Awareness in Preventive Healthcare Behavior**

Theoretical perspectives show that awareness is a key determinant of preventive healthcare behavior. Parents who are well-informed are more likely to:

- Follow vaccination schedules
- Ensure proper nutrition
- Maintain hygiene practices
- Seek timely medical consultation

Conversely, lack of awareness leads to delayed treatment, incomplete immunization, and higher risk of disease. The World Health Organization emphasizes that increasing parental awareness is one of the most effective strategies for reducing child mortality.

### **Socio-Cultural Influence on Health Behavior**

Socio-cultural factors also play an important role in shaping parental behavior. Cultural beliefs, traditions, and family norms often influence healthcare decisions. In some communities, traditional practices may replace modern medical treatment, affecting child health negatively.

Papalia et al. argue that family environment and cultural beliefs strongly influence child development and healthcare decisions (167). Therefore, healthcare awareness programs must consider cultural sensitivity to be effective.

The theoretical analysis demonstrates that parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices is influenced by psychological, social, and environmental factors. The Health Belief Model explains how risk perception and perceived benefits influence healthcare decisions. Social Cognitive Theory highlights the role of observation and community influence, while the Theory of Planned Behavior explains intention and behavioral control.

Together, these theories provide a strong framework for understanding how parents make healthcare decisions for children under five. Improving awareness through education, healthcare campaigns, and professional guidance can significantly enhance preventive healthcare practices and reduce childhood diseases.

## **5. Discussion and Analysis**

The discussion and analysis chapter interprets the findings of the study in relation to existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and research objectives. It examines how parental awareness influences preventive healthcare practices for children under five, including vaccination, nutrition, hygiene, breastfeeding, and routine medical care. The analysis is guided by the Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory, and Theory of Planned Behavior, which help explain parental decision-making in healthcare contexts (Becker 42).

Preventive healthcare is widely recognized as a key determinant of child survival and development. According to the World Health Organization, most childhood illnesses and deaths can be prevented through timely vaccination, proper nutrition, hygiene practices, and early medical intervention. However, parental awareness remains a critical factor influencing the adoption of these practices.

### **Analysis of Parental Awareness**

The findings of this study indicate that parental awareness significantly affects

preventive healthcare practices. Parents with higher education levels demonstrate better understanding of vaccination schedules, nutritional needs, and hygiene practices compared to less educated parents. This aligns with Berk's argument that education improves health-related decision-making and enhances child development outcomes (Berk 110).

Parents with adequate awareness are more likely to take their children for regular medical checkups and complete immunization schedules. On the other hand, parents with limited awareness often delay vaccinations or rely on traditional remedies, which can negatively affect child health outcomes.

The study also shows that awareness is strongly linked with access to healthcare information. Parents who frequently visit healthcare facilities or receive guidance from healthcare professionals demonstrate better preventive healthcare practices.

### **Vaccination Practices and Awareness**

Vaccination remains one of the most effective preventive healthcare measures for children under five. The findings reveal that parents who understand the importance of immunization are more likely to ensure complete vaccination of their children.

According to UNICEF, vaccination prevents millions of child deaths annually by protecting against diseases such as polio, measles, and tuberculosis. However, the study indicates that vaccine hesitancy still exists due to misinformation, cultural beliefs, and fear of side effects.

Hockenberry and Wilson explain that vaccine acceptance increases when parents receive proper counseling from healthcare professionals (235). This supports the finding that healthcare awareness campaigns significantly improve immunization rates.

### **Nutrition and Child Health Outcomes**

The analysis shows that parental awareness of nutrition plays a vital role in child health. Parents who understand the importance of balanced diets provide better nutritional care to their children, resulting in improved growth and immunity.

Malnutrition remains a major issue among children in low-income families. According to Berk, malnutrition negatively affects cognitive development and increases susceptibility to infections (122). The findings of this study confirm that lack of nutritional awareness contributes to poor child health outcomes.

Breastfeeding practices are also influenced by parental awareness. Mothers who understand the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding are more likely to follow recommended feeding practices, while others may introduce early supplementation, reducing nutritional benefits.

### **Hygiene and Preventive Practices**

Hygiene practices such as handwashing, clean drinking water, and sanitation are essential for preventing infectious diseases. The findings indicate that parents with better awareness maintain cleaner home environments and adopt hygienic practices more effectively.

The World Health Organization reports that poor sanitation is a major cause of diarrhea and other infectious diseases among children under five. The study findings support this, showing that lack of hygiene awareness increases the risk of disease transmission.

Parents who are educated about hygiene through healthcare campaigns and professionals demonstrate better preventive behavior, which reduces the incidence of childhood illnesses.

### **Role of Healthcare Professionals**

Healthcare professionals play a crucial role in improving parental awareness. The study shows that parents who regularly interact with doctors, nurses, and community health workers have better understanding of preventive healthcare practices.

Healthcare counseling significantly influences parental decisions regarding

vaccination, nutrition, and hygiene. Papalia et al. argue that healthcare guidance during early childhood improves long-term health outcomes and supports better parenting practices (173).

The findings also highlight the importance of awareness campaigns, vaccination drives, and community outreach programs in improving parental knowledge.

### **Socioeconomic Influence on Healthcare Behavior**

Socioeconomic factors such as income, education, and occupation significantly influence parental awareness and healthcare practices. The study reveals that low-income families face greater challenges in accessing healthcare services and providing nutritious food for their children.

According to Berk, poverty is directly linked to poor child health outcomes due to limited access to healthcare and education (131). This study supports this argument by showing that financially stable families demonstrate higher awareness and better preventive healthcare practices.

Cultural beliefs and traditional practices also affect healthcare decisions. In some cases, parents prefer traditional remedies over modern medical treatments, which can delay proper healthcare intervention.

### **Theoretical Interpretation of Findings**

The findings of this study are strongly supported by the Health Belief Model. Parents who perceive higher risk of diseases and understand the benefits of prevention are more likely to adopt preventive healthcare practices (Becker 45).

Social Cognitive Theory also explains that parents learn healthcare behaviors through observation and interaction with healthcare professionals and community members. Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that positive attitudes, social support, and perceived control lead to better healthcare decisions.

These theories collectively explain why awareness, education, and social environment are critical in shaping parental healthcare behavior.

### **Comparison with Previous Studies**

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research conducted by international health organizations and scholars. Studies by UNICEF confirm that parental education and awareness significantly improve vaccination coverage and child survival rates.

Similarly, WHO reports highlight that preventive healthcare education reduces childhood mortality and improves health outcomes globally. The current study supports these findings by demonstrating that parental awareness is directly linked with improved child healthcare practices.

However, the study also identifies gaps such as limited awareness in rural areas, lack of healthcare access, and persistent cultural misconceptions, which are not fully addressed in previous literature.

The discussion and analysis confirm that parental awareness is a key determinant of preventive healthcare practices for children under five. Higher awareness levels are associated with better vaccination coverage, improved nutrition, proper hygiene, and timely medical care.

The findings also highlight the influence of socioeconomic status, healthcare accessibility, and cultural beliefs on parental behavior. The theoretical frameworks used in this study effectively explain how awareness translates into healthcare practices.

Improving parental awareness through education, healthcare counseling, and community programs is essential for enhancing child health outcomes and reducing preventable diseases.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study examined parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare practices for children under five, focusing on vaccination, nutrition, hygiene, breastfeeding, and routine medical care. The findings clearly demonstrate that parental

awareness plays a decisive role in shaping child health outcomes and reducing the incidence of preventable diseases. Children whose parents possess adequate healthcare knowledge are more likely to receive timely immunization, proper nutrition, and regular medical checkups, resulting in improved physical and cognitive development (Berk 145).

Preventive healthcare is recognized globally as a cost-effective and essential approach to reducing childhood mortality. According to the World Health Organization, most deaths among children under five can be prevented through timely vaccination, adequate nutrition, sanitation, and health education. The findings of this study support this claim by showing that awareness directly influences the adoption of preventive healthcare practices.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

The study reveals several important findings:

Firstly, parental education significantly influences healthcare awareness. Educated parents are more informed about vaccination schedules, nutritional needs, and hygiene practices compared to less educated parents. This aligns with previous research which states that education improves health decision-making and child well-being (Papalia et al. 189).

Secondly, socioeconomic conditions strongly affect preventive healthcare practices. Families with better financial stability and healthcare access demonstrate higher awareness levels and better healthcare practices. In contrast, low-income families face challenges in accessing healthcare services and providing nutritious food for their children.

Thirdly, healthcare professionals and awareness campaigns play an important role in improving parental knowledge. Regular counseling by doctors and nurses increases vaccination compliance and promotes healthy childcare practices. The UNICEF also emphasizes the importance of community-based health education programs in improving child survival rates.

### **Discussion of Research Objectives**

All research objectives of the study have been successfully achieved. The study identified that:

- Parental awareness regarding preventive healthcare is moderate but varies based on education and income levels.
- Vaccination, nutrition, hygiene, and breastfeeding are essential practices for child health.
- Socioeconomic factors and healthcare accessibility significantly influence parental decisions.
- Healthcare professionals and awareness programs are essential in improving preventive healthcare behavior.

These findings are consistent with the Health Belief Model, which explains that health behavior depends on perceived risk, perceived benefits, and external cues such as healthcare guidance (Becker 52).

### **Implications of the Study**

The study has important implications for healthcare policymakers, educators, and medical professionals. It highlights the need for strengthening parental awareness programs, especially in rural and low-income communities. Government health departments should focus on expanding vaccination campaigns, improving maternal-child healthcare services, and increasing access to healthcare information.

Schools, community organizations, and healthcare institutions should collaborate to educate parents about preventive healthcare practices. Media campaigns and digital health platforms can also play a significant role in spreading awareness.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although the study provides valuable insights, it has certain limitations. The research is limited to selected hospitals and clinics in Lahore and may not represent the

entire population. The sample size is relatively small, and responses are based on self-reported data, which may include bias or inaccuracies.

Future research should include larger populations, rural areas, and longitudinal studies to better understand long-term effects of parental awareness on child health outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Healthcare authorities should organize awareness campaigns focusing on vaccination, nutrition, and hygiene.
2. Parents should be educated through community health workers and hospital-based counseling programs.
3. Government should improve healthcare accessibility in rural areas.
4. Media platforms should be used to promote preventive healthcare messages.
5. Schools should include basic health education for parents and caregivers.

### **Final Conclusion**

In conclusion, parental awareness is a fundamental factor in ensuring effective preventive healthcare for children under five. The study confirms that informed parents are more likely to adopt healthy childcare practices, resulting in reduced disease incidence and improved child development outcomes. Strengthening awareness through education, healthcare services, and community engagement is essential for improving child health in society.

By integrating healthcare education with accessible medical services, it is possible to significantly reduce preventable childhood diseases and enhance the quality of life for future generations.

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