

UNICEF SEMINAR ON HEALTH, NUTRITION AND UPBRINGING OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILD

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(This seminar was held at Tashkent in Uzbekistan from 4th to 18th September, 1967. Subsequent visits were made to the city of Yerevan in Armenia and then Moscow. The seminar was organised by the Soviet Government, represented by the Union of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the U.S.S.R. and planned together with the UNICEF).

The arrival of our group at Tashkent on 3rd. September was around mid-day and as we stepped from the plane to receive bouquets of flowers from Russian girls we found that we were going on to the state T.V. Network.

The opening address on the following day was by Mr. H.S. Zairov, Minister for Public Health of the Uzbek S.S.R. He talked of the Tsarist days when there were 141 doctors and 64 dwarfish hospitals in the whole state. Infant mortality was of the order of 300-350 and communicable, respiratory, parasitic and skin diseases were rife. Following the victory of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia, a Department of Children's Protection was established in the Uzbek Republic. It was then that Infants' Homes, Mother and Child Homes and Children's Homes were set up. Coupled with this were the Laws and Enactments signed by Vladimir Lenin concerning additional leave for working women in connection with pregnancy, additional breaks in the working day of breast-feeding mothers for feeding their infants, the prohibition of night shifts for pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers, provision of pregnant women with grants and bonuses, additional foodstuffs for pregnant women and mothers of breast-fed infants, introduction for free meals for children and so on. In the 1920's therefore as a result of these there were springing up, not in Uzbekistan alone but all over the Soviet Union, new Maternity Homes, Women's Consulting Clinics, Children's Consulting Clinics, Children's Hospitals, Children's Boarding Schools, Creches and Kindergartens, Milk Kitchens and so on. These have increased over the years and by January 1967, in the Uzbek Republic alone (population 10 million) there were 100,537 hospital beds of which 14,124 obstetrical and gynaecological beds, 328 Womens Consulting Clinics, 362 Children Consulting Clinics, 18,772 hospital beds for infants and children, 18 Infant and Children Homes, 1,867 Creches and Creche-Kindergartens with accommodation for 134,230 infants and children and 39 Children Sanatoria. In 1967 there were 16,408 obstetricians-gynaecologists and 1,969 paediatricians, and 49,279 para-medical personnel of which 8,284 were midwives and feldsher-midwives.

The following day S.K. Ziyadullayev compared the conditions in the state of Uzbekistan before the revolution when there were no more than 160 secondary schools with 17,300 pupils

and 700 teachers. Facilities for pre-school children were 3 privately owned kindergartens in Tashkent, which had been set up for gaining profit alone. Now however besides the conventional schools there are facilities for physical training of children and adolescents. Ninety-five Children's and Junior sports schools function; where thirty thousand children and adolescents are studying. More than five thousand physical culture groups have been set up at general educational schools. The school canteens which exist are substantial and have on their menus milk and milk products, meat, vegetables and fruit dishes as well as sandwiches and various pies, buns etc which are sold at cost price.

K. Mahkamova's paper gave an account of the special facilities and financial help granted to women during and after pregnancy plus the financial help given to mothers with many children. Every working woman, irrespective of her job is given a pregnancy and delivery leave, 112 calendar days long-i.e. 56 days antenatally plus 56 days postnatally, while in case of pathological delivery the postnatal leave increases to 70 days. Accounts were also given of pre-school establishment and establishments for mentally handicapped children.

Following this particular lecture there was a visit to a Kindergarten-creche for 120 children from 2-7 years. In this kindergarten there was 5 educators, a paediatrician, a nurse and one musical instructor. Children could be kept there for up to 12 hours during which time they were given some elementary schooling and had facilities for singing, dancing and playing. Payment by parents varied from 2 to 7 Roubles depending on their paying capacity.

Creche-kindergarten No. 340 in the Chirchik Raion of Tashkent was much bigger with a capacity for 280 children. Children spent 12 hours a day there and the education and upbringing of children in this institution is the first stage in the general system of children's education. Children of 2 months to 7 years are divided into 5 creche and kindergarten groups. Each group of children is isolated from the others, has a separate entrance, games room, bedroom and chamber-pot room. Each child has his individual bed, towel and chamber-pot. Children to be admitted to the kindergarten are first examined by the paediatrician prior to coming in contact with healthy children.

Children at the creche-kindergarten are daily examined by the paediatricians. They are inoculated against communicable diseases. If the child or infant becomes ill they are isolated from the others and then directly sent to hospital or sent home. At the creches fixed regimens for infants and children of every age exist; and this stipulates time limits for sleep, feeding and periods when child is awake.

Children and infant's meals and feeding are planned according to age. The calorie content of the daily meals as well as their protein, fat and carbohydrate content are given attention. Besides the elements of reading and writing, the children are taught lasting and useful habits of personal hygiene plus a feeling of comradeship.

The next few papers dealt with the protection of health of pregnant mothers and that of the newborn. This was followed by visits to Maternity Hospitals.

The paper by M. A. Mirzamuhamedov dealt with the Medical Services for children of pre-school age. Prior to the revolution of 1917 the Uzbek Republic had very few facilities for children. Now it has 369 Children's Consulting Clinics, Childrens Hospitals with 16,673 beds, 18 Children's Homes, 39 Children Sanatoria for 7,502 children, 1,965 beds, permanent creches for 114,338 children. There were in 1965, 1969 paediatricians in Uzbekistan. The main trend in the medical services for children, according to this paper is the prevention of disease and all-round curative aid. This paper described the Modern Childrens Hospital as one with a Polyclinic and a established multipurpose establishment with a certain number of beds. This being so it was the main curative and preventive establishment for children upto 15 years of age.

Besides the visits made to the polyclinics, the paediatrician and the nurse visit all the children until they are 2 years old. Children upto 3 years are visited twice a year.

The Polyclinics also have Milk Distribution Centres which provide high quality food for children. The Milk Kitchens also distribute milk according to doctors prescription. Nutritive mixtures are provided free of charge for such children during the first year of life.

The Polyclinics also provide specialised treatment and have ophthalmologists, E.N.T. surgeons, surgeons, rheumatologists, dermatologists, neurologists, dentists etc. Provision also exists for the mother to care for the child when he is in hospital, by being allowed to stay there.

The other papers dealt with pre-school Education. Medical Services to Rural areas, Childrens' Nutrition and Public Health in the Uzbek S.S.R. There were visits to other creches and kindergartens in both rural and urban areas, to orphanages and state farms.

The five days spent after the 14th at Yerevan were designed to show comparable facilities for pre-school children and childrens sanatoria. The last two days at Moscow were mainly to acquaint us with the work being done at the Institute of Paediatrics.

Impressions.

My participation in this seminar has to a certain extent changed a considerable amount of my preconceived views and notions regarding the care, nutrition and upbringing of pre-school children. My views are purely personal and readers may differ or not agree to what is written.

The population of the Uzbek S.S.R. being 10 millions is comparable to ours. The people too are not vastly different in that they are an Oriental race which has adapted to what may be termed a Western mode of living. Nevertheless a good many years lie ahead before we can even hope to achieve what is already being practised there.

The Uzbek S.S.R., nay the U.S.S.R. is a Paediatricians Paradise. They have two sets of doctors—physicians and paediatricians—and the latter look after all those upto the age of 16 years. One has only to glance at their 1967 figure of 1,969 paediatricians for 10 million people to our barely 10 for the same number. The figure of 10 million in both

instances is of course the general population and not just children. Their figure of 18,700 hospital beds for children compares with a very liberal estimate of about 150 in the whole of Nepal. (This includes the infant cots at all the maternity units).

The crying need then is for having more hospital facilities, more hospital beds, more paediatricians and last but not least for that special breed of 'paediatric' nurse.

The sad fact that remains however is that not much importance is attached to the development of paediatric facilities. This is not so in the Soviet Union. 'Everything best to children', Lenin said as far back as the dawn of Soviet power, and this most humane demand of Lenin has been sacredly fulfilled since then in the Soviet Union.

The fact is that the child population of a nation is its potential wealth for the future. Once a child is cured he becomes as good as new. He is not a burden to society at large. A healthy young nation works hard and strives for the future. Money spent on children is never wasted—it always has its returns.

The only way to increase the hospital beds for children is by establishing a Children's Hospital at Kathmandu and also at other important towns of Nepal. For Kathmandu it is an immediate necessity, in other places there should be for the time being special sections in General Hospitals. These special sections would have to run both indoor and outdoor facilities for children.

Of course eight M.C.H. Centres exist in the country. These are performing a necessary service distributing milk and vitamins to needy children. But so far they seem to me to be an add-on to the system and outside it still. What is required for them is to become part and parcel of Children's services in this country. Where they exist, they should be expanded to provide a more regular service.

Next comes the most important point of all. The necessity of having a child's record card. In the U.S.S.R. as soon as a child is born the Maternity Unit issues him a card with all the birth details. The child then follows the card to the creche or kindergarten which he has to attend. From there once the child starts schooling the card is sent on to the Polyclinic of that particular area. By this time details of birth, immunisation, allergies, previous illnesses and their treatment are on the card. So much importance is attached to these cards that a child cannot change his school if he does not have a complete and up-to-date health card with him.

One of the facilities for pre-school children which can be provided almost immediately is by the establishment of creches and kindergartens. Well-to-do working mothers can bear the cost of the private business institutions of this nature. I believe that a number of Girls' Colleges, which run courses on domestic science are thinking of establishing these. Also the Central Office of Bal Sangathan (Children's Organisation) is thinking in terms of doing one. What I would like to see would be the establishment of these creches and kindergartens for children of working mothers established on a country-wide basis. The only Organisation that I can visualise as being able to do this at the present is the Mahila Sangathan which has branches in almost every Zilla in the country.