مؤسسة الملك خالد
KING KHALID FOUNDATION

Next Generation of Saudis

Childhood in Saudi Arabia

Research Report | 2025

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Executive Summary

More than 8 million Saudi children live among us.***** A promising childhood in a homeland full of opportunities and a world full of threats. But what does it mean to be a child in the time of the Vision? This question was not addressed to the children interviewed during the past three years, but was clearly evident in their responses and self-expression. Children may be the most affected by all the pivotal changes the Kingdom is undergoing, as expressed in their innocent quotes, which outline their ambitions and hopes for themselves in the coming years.

This research report provides an in-depth analysis of the lived reality of children in Saudi Arabia, chronicling their life journey. It highlights positive childhood experiences and warns of the magnitude of the risks threatening the present and future of the next generation of Saudis. The report concluded that childhood in the Kingdom is promising, but involves dangerous experiences, requiring a new set of policies to make our homes, cities, and digital spaces safer for children.

In this research, childhood refers to persons under the age of eighteen, as stipulated in the Saudi Child Protection Law. Before delving into proposed policy solutions, KKF confirms through this research that the greatest risk and biggest opportunity for a child stems from the decisions the parents make regarding the child's life. KKF believes that the time is ripe for the community to re-examine suitable ways for the modern Saudi family to raise its children and embrace upbringing practices that empower children to realize their fullest aspirations, which are increasingly fostered in their spirit by The Kingdom's Vision.

The determinants of childhood in the Kingdom begin from the moment parents decide to marry and their choices regarding family size, parenting methods, and choices of pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing. Getting married or having and raising children without prior skills is an uncalculated risk, like driving without prior instruction. The study revealed challenges parents face in organizing their families, their confusion, and their lack of awareness and knowledge of the requirements for caring for their children at different stages of childhood.

As for the facilities that are safe and appropriately equipped for children to pursue an active lifestyle, discover themselves, and practice their hobbies, they remain scarce. This is occurring amid growing calls from children and their parents for more spaces for sports, play, and other social activities. One of the most significant risks facing children is the digital world, where they spend a significant amount of time, are exposed to increasingly harmful content, meet friends and strangers, and face constant bullying and abuse during their childhood.

Schools emerged as academic and social enablers for many children in the Kingdom, and most children emphasized the importance of education in determining their future. However, the report's most salient finding was the growing gap between home and school, expressed by teachers and parents through mutual accusations. Teachers perceived parents as absent from their children's education, while parents perceived the teaching staff as negligent and burdened by the school's endless demands throughout the school year.

> "Saudi Arabia is becoming something big, something new that has never happened in the world. Something unprecedented."
>
> - Male teenager, 17 years old, Al-Ahsa

> "Saudi Arabia will be the richest country in the world."
>
> - Girl, 13 years old, Al-Namas

*. General Authority for Statistics
Population Estimates
Publication 2024

The report, presented by children and their parents, addressed several aspects of child abuse in the Kingdom, including bullying within schools and sexual harassment and abuse in the streets, at school, and online. The report identified negative behaviors that threaten children due to peer influence, such as smoking, drug use, and the risk of abuse or neglect. Children in Saudi Arabia also suffer from malnutrition, poor dietary diversity, and increasing prevalence of unhealthy foods, which have become increasingly accessible to children, resulting in significant health consequences for children's health and lifestyle. In addition to the excessive time spent on screens and harmful content, and their effect on the emergence of gaming disorders and technology addiction.

The report presents **a set of zero-sum recommendations**, through which KKF relies on the feasibility of the solutions that are most cost-effective and value-driven, have the least impact on the country's public budget, and are most sustainable in enhancing children's quality of life. This is achieved by focusing on prevention, proactiveness, innovation, technology and the participation of the private and non-profit sectors in enhancing children's safety, protection, quality of life and well-being. Through this report, KKF puts forward 30 recommendations in 10 different areas, as follows:

1 Protecting children from the dangers of tobacco products

2 Reducing childhood obesity rates and improving nutritional quality

3 Intensifying early detection and intervention to reduce disability among high-risk newborns

4 Digital integration between government platforms to focus on child safety and health

5 Protecting children from inappropriate content in the digital space

6 Disseminating marriage, childbirth, and parenting skills to spouses and divorcees

7 Encouraging high-priority medical specialties and skills for children's health

8 Creating a friendly built environment in Saudi cities for families, mothers, and children

9 Protecting children from the risk of abuse by amending the Child Protection Law

10 Extending insurance coverage to include comprehensive access to reproductive, women's and children's health services and products

"**If you go into the supermarket, everything you find in it is Saudi.**"

- Female teenager, 15 years old, Al-Namas

"**I am very happy. I want to live as long as I can so that I can see the development and the wonderful things that are happening.**"

- Female teenager, 16 years old, Tabuk

Introduction

The King Khalid Foundation (KKF) is committed to publishing evidence-based research and studies on various segments of society, especially the neediest. This publication is an extension of this commitment and the KKF's desire to understand the living conditions of children in Saudi Arabia since the KKF's contribution to the issuance of the Child Protection Law in the Kingdom in 2014, stemming from the belief that empowering future generations is the fundamental pillar for sustaining our wealth and preserving our society, values, and identity.

Through this study, we present the lived reality of children, their families, and those working with them in the Kingdom, examining both positive and negative childhood experiences. We discuss the best solutions to protect the next generation of Saudis, based on the opinions of local and international experts and specialists, and after reviewing programs and interventions implemented by peer countries that have proven successful in achieving child welfare and preserving their safety, development, and quality of life.

The report is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses childhood experiences based on qualitative field research conducted by the King Khalid Foundation in all regions of the Kingdom, and in light of the results of relevant national surveys and indicators. Childhood experiences in Saudi Arabia focused on ten basic experiences.

The second section of the report examines the situation of childhood in the Kingdom, highlighting challenges, such as weak family planning by parents and weak parenting skills. A recurring challenge expressed by children and parents is the lack of places and activities for children. As for the learning experience, the most prominent challenge was the gap between school and home. Several negative behaviors have emerged among children that require a package of interventions, such as malnutrition and the spread of smoking. Among the traumatic experiences covered in the report are the harm that some children experience, such as parental separation, neglect and domestic abuse, and the harassment that some children face. The experience of disability in children has been demonstrated to be strongly linked to early childhood, with delayed diagnosis missing the opportunity for early therapeutic intervention.

The second section of the report reviews the most prominent preventive, skill-based, educational, spatial, health, legislative, and financial interventions, based on what has proven effective and impactful in the peer countries' practices. The report concludes with the KKF's recommendations to protect the next generation of Saudis.

The Ten Childhood Experiences

1 Family Planning

It deals with the beginning of a child's story when their parents get married, and the health and educational decisions made by parents that determine the child's fate for the rest of their life.

2 Parenthood

The relationship between parents and their children, and the role of domestic workers and the extended family in raising children.

3 Child Welfare

The bright side of children's lives in the Kingdom, as highlighted by the sample and indicators, and a review of experiences in play, sports, hobbies, family security, friendships, social life, ambition and hope, and opportunities for living in the era of the Saudi Vision 2030.

4 Sedentary Lifestyle

A set of practices and behaviors that lead to a sedentary lifestyle, such as staying up late, poor nutrition, school absence, apathy and social isolation.

5 Exposure to Harm

A set of adverse experiences that cause harm to the child and that children go through, as revealed by testimonies from the research sample and relevant national indicators. The most prominent of these experiences are: Bullying, abuse, neglect, harassment, and lack of traffic safety.

6 Loss

An experience that many children go through due to various life circumstances, such as the death of a parent, parental separation, or the imprisonment of a parent.

7 Disability

Disability is closely linked to childhood in Saudi Arabia due to the prevalence of early detectable diseases among children, the lifestyle and challenges facing these children and their families, and the development opportunities available, as seen by practitioners and specialists.

8 Learning

It is an experience in which the child spends a large part of their time and life. This experience encompassed the child's journey within the school walls, through the various stages of education, their academic achievement, social empowerment, and the friendships and skills they build. In addition to reviewing the risks the child faces in their educational journey.

9 Use of Technology

Children's access to the digital world, benefits of using technology, and challenges they face related to screen time, exposure to harmful content, and the emergence of digital addiction and gaming disorders.

10 Transition to Adulthood

Characteristics of adolescents' childhood experience, their transition between stages, their educational and social life journey, and the responsibilities they face, which vary between the burden of care and reaching adulthood.

About the Report's Methodology

This report relied on a combined quantitative and qualitative methodology to explore childhood experiences in Saudi Arabia. The quantitative methodology relied on a KKF's survey of a representative sample of the Saudi population (3250), conducted by the Saudi Center for Opinion Polling (SCOP) in 2025, with joint funding from the King Khalid Foundation, Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation, to identify parents' preferences for parenthood styles, and identifying some of the potential risks facing children in schools and other places where they are present.

Qualitative field research was the primary driver of the research project, whose data collection efforts began in 2022 and extended through March 2025. This effort aimed to gain an unbiased understanding of the childhood experience in the Kingdom, free from any preconceived notions or opinions about the reality of these experiences.

The research team formulated a specific question to understand the childhood experience in the Kingdom:

Research Question

What is the childhood experience like in the Kingdom?

It took three years to answer this question, including extensive research interviews with 713 children, parents, and practitioners in 18 cities, governorates, and villages across the Kingdom. The research included sitting with children between 7 and 18 years of age, their families, and their caregivers in all the facilities frequented by children (educational, health, social development, and non-profit sector facilities, etc.).

Cities, governorates, and villages that were visited in the field to collect qualitative data.

Riyadh	Jeddah	Dhahran	Al-Ahsa	Hafar Al-Batin	Tabuk	Najran	Al-Baha	Bisha
Yanbu	Al-Namas	Umluj	Al Wajh	Mashalia	Qilwah	Tanomah	Althanyh	Baydha

Categories of children and parents who were interviewed.

Children of well-off (wealthy) families	Children of separated families (with divorced parents)	Children of the families of the military officers and soldiers serving on the southern border
Adolescents · Children of prisoners · Orphans · Addicts · Intellectual disabilities		
Children in public and private education · Children in their early years · Down syndrome		
Children with autism · Juveniles · Children with illness and health challenges · Children exposed to domestic violence		
People with ADHD · Children of low-income families · Children in social care homes		
Children with cancer · Undocumented or unregistered children (without legal identity) · Children of Saudi women married to foreigners		

We also sat down with the parents of these categories, including married, widowed, and separated mothers and fathers.

Categories of practitioners who were interviewed

| Teachers | School principals | Special education specialists | Psychologists | Child care specialists | Child life specialists |

| Lactation consultants | Student guidance specialists | Social workers | volunteers | Supervisors and trainers |

| Family counselors | Rehabilitation specialists |

!

It should be **noted** that the research team did not meet with the parents of foster families for children without parental care, and data was not collected from domestic workers and nannies.

After reviewing all the raw experiences that children go through around the Kingdom, based on field research and conducting a qualitative thematic analysis, the research team reached the following answer:

> Childhood in the Kingdom is not a single experience, but rather a collection of diverse, varied, and changing risks, depending on the decisions of the mother and father regarding family planning, parenting styles, the degree of complementarity between caregivers, the likelihood of children being harmed or losing a parent, sedentary or active lifestyles, and the extent to which children are empowered to learn and use technology until they reach adulthood.

In other words, the research findings warn of the risks to which children in Saudi Arabia are exposed today for a variety of reasons, which depend primarily on the choices and decisions of the parents, the lifestyle provided to the child by their caregivers, the various forms of harm, intentional or unintentional, to which children are exposed in their environment, their ability to benefit from available formal and informal learning methods, and their safe access to the digital space, which determines their launch into adulthood. The report below reviews the experiences of children in Saudi Arabia, based on evidence gathered by field researchers from all regions of the Kingdom. It also examines a telephone survey conducted by KKF to identify parental preferences. Additionally, it reviews national indicators from surveys conducted by the General Authority for Statistics and international organizations on childhood in the Kingdom. Through a review of experiences, we also present what international literature, practitioners, and specialists have covered on the various stages of childhood, to provide the latest expert opinions based on evidence and proof on child care.

A survey of Saudi society and parents, jointly funded by

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Saleh Abdullah Kamel
Humanitarian Foundation

عبدالقادر المهيدب
لخدمة المجتمع
Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation

The study concluded that childhood in the Kingdom goes through 10 main experiences that shape the living reality of Saudi children:

1 Family Planning	2 Parenthood	3 Child Welfare	4 Sedentary Lifestyle
5 Exposure to Harm	6 Loss	7 Disability	8 Learning
9 Use of Technology	10 Transition to Adulthood		

It should be emphasized that these experiences vary and differ, which does not mean, in particular, that every child in Saudi Arabia goes through or is affected by all of these experiences.

Chapter 1

Childhood Experiences

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Family Planning

I

Every child's destiny begins with their mother and father's engagement decision, and their choices regarding family planning: The family's place of residence, the parenthood style adopted by the parents, the level of available income, the number of children the parents are willing to have, and the absence of any genetic diseases or health risks that could be transmitted from the parents to the child and affect their life course.

The experience of parents encountered in qualitative field research indicates that families are unsure about the importance of proper family planning and have not given prior thought to the appropriate family size. Most of the sample were surprised by the news of the pregnancy, and the parents had not thought of the decision about the method of delivery and the birth plan. In many cases, mothers expressed their dissatisfaction with the doctor's change of the birth plan. From a psychological and health perspective, there was no evidence of complete readiness for the experience of pregnancy and childbirth. Challenges facing breastfeeding mothers have become increasingly apparent, including a lack of full knowledge of the method and importance of breastfeeding, widespread misconceptions about breastfeeding, and the lack of designated breastfeeding spaces for working mothers in the workplace and in public places. This section will discuss the following topics:

1 Planned pregnancies

2 Pregnancy and childbirth

3 Postpartum stage

Planned pregnancies

International literature confirms that family planning by parents has a significant impact on the child's health. Parents' decisions before and during pregnancy affect the outcomes of the child's life. Therefore, the child's health must take into account the continuum of care in a comprehensive manner, starting from reproductive health, maternal health, and extending to the health of the newborn, and the health of the child and adolescent.

Practices around the world focus on the life course approach, which revolves around the human being throughout their life stages, from newborns, through children and adolescents, to the elderly and next generations. This approach prioritizes early intervention at every stage to achieve better long-term results and impact. This trend is confirmed by emerging research findings on the concept of Developmental Origins of Health and Disease (DOHaD),[1] which demonstrates that fetal development and early life events in childhood contribute to shaping a person's long-term health in adulthood. Poor fetal growth leads to an increased incidence of diabetes, heart disease, strokes, and impaired cognition and motor skills in adulthood. The health of the mother and father before childbirth also affects the health of the fetus, especially factors such as psychological illness and obesity.[2]

1. DOHaD stands for Developmental Origins of Health and Disease.

2 **"Framework for applying the life course approach"**. World Health Organization (WHO) 2025

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Below, we review the most prominent experiences expressed by parents during the early stages of pregnancy, childbirth, and delivery, based on qualitative field research.

Starting with family planning methods, a group of the sample expressed that they had no prior planning for family size or pregnancy:

> "Research team: Did you all plan to have children?
>
> W3: No, I didn't.
>
> W4: No.
>
> Research team: None of you planned?
>
> W4: "Before giving birth to my last child, I took birth control pills for 6 years. I had pain in my back and legs, and the doctor advised me to stop taking them. So, I stopped taking them, and I prayed to Allah that I would not get pregnant, but I got pregnant 8 months later."
>
> W4: "My sisters used to bring me birth control pills because my husband didn't have money to buy them for me."

A group of mothers from a medium-sized city

> "I will tell you why I gave birth three times in a row, because I suffered from the birth control method."

A mother from a medium city

Several national indicators confirm the challenges in providing access to family planning. Indicators from the General Authority for Statistics showed that in 2024, the percentage of married Saudi women of reproductive age whose need for family planning methods was not met using modern methods reached 43%.

Percentage of women of reproductive age (15 to 49 years) whose need for family planning is met using a modern method[4]:

Australia	USA	Brazil	Argentina	Mexico	KSA
90%	85%	80%	75%	70%	56%
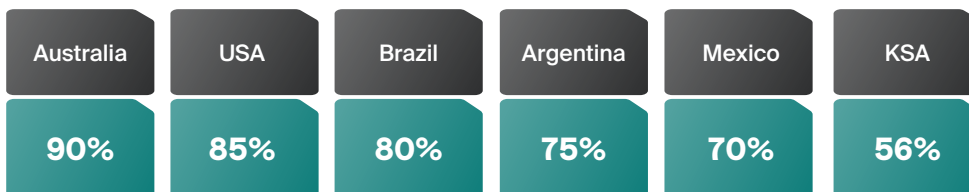
This indicator is one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicators (3.7.1), and the indicator was measured in Saudi Arabia for married women of reproductive age.

4 Children

When the community was asked about the ideal number of children for each family, it appeared that Saudis believe the appropriate number is approximately [3]

55%

of Saudis reported that the best time for newlyweds to have children was the second year of marriage[3]

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3. The results of a SCOP's survey conducted on a representative sample of Saudis, which was jointly funded by the KKF, Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation.

4. Data of the Kingdom issued by the General Authority for Statistics, **Women Health and Reproductive Care Statistics Publication 2024: (Value for the total population, value for Saudi women: 57.2%)**

▶

Pregnancy and childbirth

During the field research, the sample of mothers shared some challenges they faced during the pregnancy and childbirth stage, including the natural feelings of anxiety and fatigue that every mother experiences during pregnancy. Experts emphasize the importance of pregnant women receiving the full range of support, care, and advice they need during this period. The World Health Organization recommends that women have eight prenatal visits and three antenatal visits with obstetricians. During these visits, the medical staff discuss with each mother the appropriate care priorities for her condition, such as assessing her health and chronic diseases (e.g. diabetes and blood pressure), monitoring her lifestyle to observe nutrition, smoking, and other issues, as well as following up on vaccinations and necessary tests to monitor the fetus's health.

But these are not enough, according to WHO's recommendations. WHO indicates the need for women to receive care 3 to 6 months before pregnancy in order to ensure that the mother is well-nourished and healthy enough to begin planning for pregnancy. Further, they should start taking nutritional supplements – especially folic acid – to reduce the possibility of birth defects of the brain, spine, and spinal cord in children. Therefore, family planning and reproductive health are very important before pregnancy. In addition to the possibility of needing fertility care if there are difficulties in conceiving.

The focus on preconception care must include the father, and the integration of men into family care and planning. It is an emerging field that has recently gained attention, emphasizing the importance of men's health in fertility quality and its impact on fetal health, including genetic diseases, growth risks, and miscarriage rates.[5]

Looking at maternal and child health indicators, the Kingdom is advanced in this field thanks to the advanced healthcare provided by the health system:

8 Visits

Average number of prenatal care visits by pregnant women in the Kingdom in 2024.[6]

Maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births [7]:

Mexico	USA	China	UK	KSA	Australia
42	17	16	8	7	2

Rate of births attended by skilled health personnel [8]:

KSA	USA	Argentina	Australia	Brazil	Mexico
100%	99%	99%	99%	98%	88%
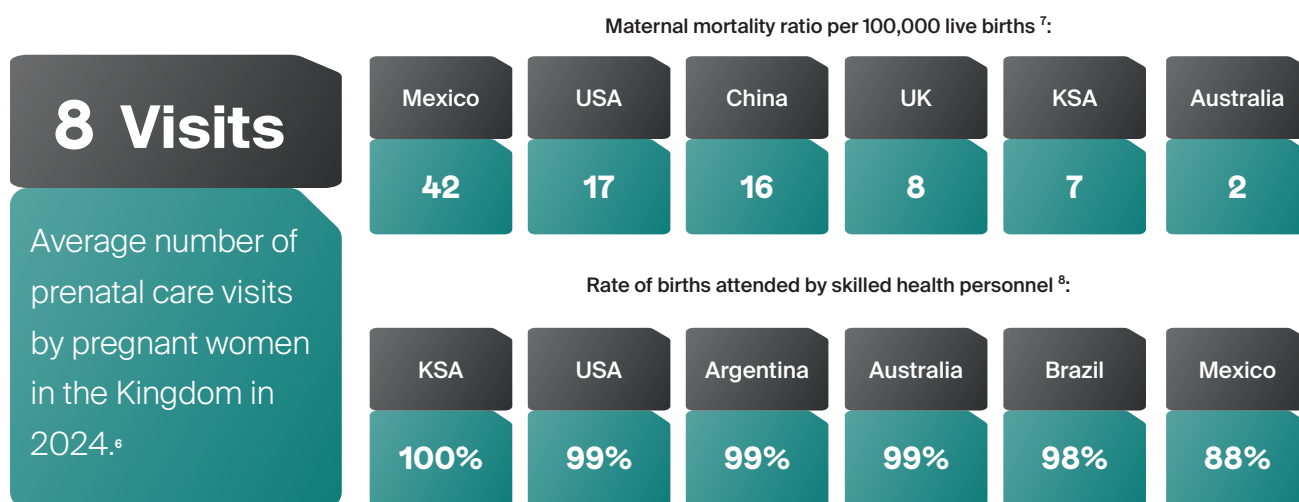
5. **"Preconception care"** – Regional Expert Group Consultation - WHO. (2013)..

6. General Authority for Statistics **"Women Health and Reproductive Care Statistics Publication 2024"**

7. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2025), **"Maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births"**.

8. WHO,**"Maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health and ageing indicators"**

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The mothers in the sample were asked about their preparation for pregnancy and childbirth, and many expressed reliance on advice from their mothers, sisters, extended family members, and recommendations from their physicians, in addition to using social media content. A small portion of the sample addressed the existence of some prevailing societal views about pregnancy and childbirth that significantly impact the birthing process, such as the dangers of movement for pregnant women:

"The two pregnancies were very different because the first one was in a western country, and the second one was here in Saudi Arabia. During my first pregnancy, I was forced to move a lot because of the lifestyle around me. I always cooked at home and I was healthier. I was exercising, eating, and I was always following up during the two pregnancies. I had visited a doctor, even from the time I was planning to get pregnant. The first two births were natural. The second pregnancy was more tiring because there were social obligations. People are sometimes not very forgiving, and when you are pregnant, they give you an excuse but they make you feel that you have taken it too far."

Mother, a big city

"Frankly, I was given advice that did not help me, such as: don't exhaust yourself after giving birth during the postpartum period. I remember after I read and understood that this was not correct. After giving birth, a woman should do exercise, walk, go out, and breathe. She shouldn't stay asleep for a month. Any woman I see now, I tell her, "No, don't sleep nor drink these herbal things that you have every day." Old women are used to telling you to eat bread and porridge. No. Exercise, go out, breathe, and act normally."

Mother, a big city

Some mothers who do not live in major cities said that they faced the challenge of their doctors not respecting their birth plans:

"My first birth was a C-section. The cervix was closed and the pelvis was narrow. I have the full report. Three years later, I went to a doctor here at (the governorate name) Hospital and told the doctor everything. He forced me to have a natural birth."

Mother, a big city

Postpartum stage

A newborn's first days are pivotal in shaping their physical health and development even from the first hours. International best practices emphasize early breastfeeding and skin-to-skin contact between mother and child during the first hour of life. To enable the mother to make these choices early, it requires prior awareness during the period of preparing for pregnancy and childbirth.

Breastfeeding rate within the first hour after birth [9]:

Brazil	India	KSA	Japan	China
70%	66%	65%	61%	60%
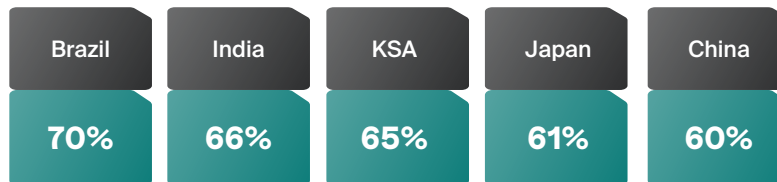
During the newborn's first hours and days, international experts recommend conducting a number of screening tests to ensure the early detection and intervention of any child health issue, such as screening for hearing impairments in newborns. This is because delaying the detection of diseases and disabilities misses the opportunity for early intervention to contain and provide necessary treatment, including reducing the significant impact of the disability on the child's future life. Although parents may see their newborns as healthy and safe, the newborns may carry rare genetic diseases that are not apparent until they are detected. Therefore, countries launch national programs, such as the National Newborn Screening Program to reduce disability in the Kingdom. [10].This program seeks to raise awareness about this issue by focusing on September of each year as a global awareness month for the importance of early screening of newborns to reduce morbidity and disability.

But in the face of this huge number of recommendations and interventions, countries began to turn to confronting the challenges of excess and deficiency, as the problem of the mother and child getting too little too late (TLTL) or too much too soon (TMTS) arose. This has led to a new vision for healthcare facilities, refocusing efforts on the family, the child, and the mother, and reducing unnecessary interventions before they are needed, including the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) launched by WHO and UNICEF in 1991. The Saudi Ministry of Health has interpreted this initiative into an initiative called "Baby, Mother and Family-Friendly Maternity Facility (BMFMF)" to create a supportive environment for mothers, and train workers on skills to provide assistance to mothers and encourage breastfeeding.[11].

9. Comparison of the Kingdom's data in the Women and Child Health Survey with the findings of Kenzo Takahashi et al. **"Rates of early initiation of breastfeeding and determinants of its delay"**: Secondary analysis from WHO's global survey. Scientific Reports Journal. 2017.

10 **"Child's Health - Newborn Babies"**. Saudi Ministry of Health

11. Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) Saudi Ministry of Health

The focus on encouraging breastfeeding is a top priority because of "the health and psychological benefits it provides to the mother, child, and family. Breast milk plays a vital role in promoting the child's health and strengthening their immunity, as well as in supporting the mother's health after childbirth." It helps the mother cleanse the uterus, reduce bleeding, relieve postpartum cramps, reduce the risk of postpartum depression, and help her burn fat. It also helps boost the infant's immune system and healthy mental development, maintains their normal weight, and enhances the emotional bond, child behavior, and sense of security between mother and infant. International experiences also indicate that the grandmother and husband play a positive role in supporting breastfeeding and reassuring the mother to face the challenges and fears associated with lactation.[12].

The sample of mothers and practitioners spoke about lactation challenges, which ranged from a lack of awareness and knowledge of the importance of breastfeeding among mothers:

> "With my first child, I couldn't [breastfeed] because I didn't know I was obligated to do that,"
>
> Mother, a small city

to the severe difficulties facing a mother is to produce milk and breastfeed in general, and the influence and pressure of society on the breastfeeding mother:

> "I make breastfeeding consultations for mothers. A breastfeeding mother, who follows up with me via phone, would implement a plan for two or three months and things work out for her, but suddenly, something would go wrong. For example, when the mother treated her nipple confusion and was able to breastfeed her baby normally, and didn't mix formula milk with natural breastfeeding, I suddenly found her introducing formula milk! Societal rumors, such as 'your child will never grow up,' have affected mothers badly. In addition, a big challenge that lactation consultants face is when a breastfeeding mother introduces formula milk immediately after birth without taking the lactation consultant's permission. Hospitals may also admit formula milk for women after giving birth without seeking the advice of a lactation consultant."
>
> Lactation consultant, a big city

Dissatisfaction has grown among specialist practitioners with the lack of breastfeeding rooms in public places and workplaces, and many working mothers have shared the challenge of continuing to breastfeed after they return to work:

> "I saw some places, without mentioning names, that had a smoking room for women, but doesn't have a breastfeeding room."
>
> Practitioner, a big city

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12. Saudi Ministry of Health – **Breastfeeding and Women's Health**

"I was an employee. I breastfed my last son for a month, and my first two children for one year because I was not an employee then."

Mother, a big city

The thing that's really worn me out here is the whole breastfeeding situation. I nurse naturally and feed directly from the breast—I don't pump. One reason I haven't been out of the house for two months is that there are just no places set up for nursing. None whatsoever. The only place I went to and had a breastfeeding room was (a shop name). The room was bad, awful, and it was dirty. I had to move to where the car was located, and I had to park in a very close place to me to get into the car when I needed to breastfeed my baby."

Mother, a big city

31%

of parents reported that they don't use a child car seat.[13]

It is important to ensure that there is a child seat in the car before leaving the hospital with your newborn. Some hospitals prohibit the handover of a baby to their parents before ensuring that the baby's car seat has been purchased. More important than that, however, is the awareness and care of parents in purchasing a good seat that is appropriate for the child's size and using it properly inside the car, until the child reaches the appropriate age to start wearing a seat belt. One of the most prominent risks observed was children driving vehicles under the legal age.[13]:

"I've been driving since I was in grade 6. I had a car but I had an accident. I was driving when I had this accident and the car was badly damaged. I wasn't wearing a seatbelt."

Teenager, a medium governorate

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> "I'm 12 years old. I have a car and Internet access. I learned to drive two years ago. I was stopped, but they let me continue. The understanding is that if I have company, they'll release me immediately. If I'm alone, they'll only hold me for a brief questioning before releasing me."
>
> Little kid in a small village

When asked about car seats for children, a small number of parents mentioned having them in their cars, while the majority of them admitted not using them:

> "I was less careful at first with my little kids, but now I am more careful when they are wearing seat belts. The issue is that the maid holds the little kid, so that he is on her lap, so I think that is a mistake." I only have one child seat in the car, but it can't accommodate all three kids, because the car isn't big enough and it won't fit all three child seats. Where will the rest of them fit? Where will the maid sit? This is one of the reasons. I believe that one must wear a seatbelt when they ride in a car.
>
> Father in a big city

The discussion of the family planning experience reveals that there are diverse and varied experiences of reproductive choices. These choices are compounded by the selections that follow them regarding the method and style of raising children after leaving the maternity hospital, which will be discussed in the parenthood experience.

Parenthood

This publication presents diverse experiences of parents in Saudi Arabia and their parenting preferences. KKF conducted a national survey, jointly funded by the Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation, to identify these preferences, in addition to the results of qualitative field research.

Qualitative data on parents revealed several aspects related to parental care and education issues that can be summarized within the following themes:

1 Agreement of mothers and fathers on raising their children

2 Communication and mutual trust between children and parents

3 Guidance and awareness of children by parents

4 Presence of mothers and fathers

5 Support provided by domestic workers

42%
of parents play with their children without using electronic devices approximately once a day.[14].

61%
of Saudis prefer that one parent be employed and the other be a full-time homemaker, and nearly half of Saudis believe that raising children in today's world is extremely difficult.[14].

The experience of parenthood, despite its diversity, reveals the parents' confusion regarding matters of upbringing, with the mother's predominance in the child's life compared to the father's role. More importantly, the overwhelming presence of domestic workers in the lives of many children, with a diminished role of parents in families that employ domestic workers.

Agreement of mothers and fathers on raising their children

The field research sample showed a discrepancy in the opinions of mothers and fathers regarding raising their children. Sometimes such a discrepancy reaches the point of mutual blame between the mother and father regarding parenting issues, as expressed by a large group of mothers and fathers who were interviewed. It appears most often when a certain situation occurs with the child, and the child often witnesses an exchange of blame between the parents.

14. The results of a SCOP's survey on a representative sample of Saudis, jointly funded by the KKF, Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation.

"I'll tell you about a situation that happened with my son. He came from school one day and said to me that a boy had hit him. I was sitting here, and his mother was there. His mother told him to go and tell the school administration. The following day, my son came from school and said that the same boy had hit him again. I told him that I would go with him the following day and spoke with the school administration. While we were in the car on the way to school. I said to him, 'Whoever hits you, hit him back. Defend yourself.' The following day, we were at home, and my son said to me, 'Dad, if so-and-so hits me, I'll hit him, right?' I pretended not to hear, but my son wanted his mother to hear. The following day, he repeated the same question, and his mother said to him, 'No, don't hit anyone at school.' I told her, 'Yes, he should hit who hits him.' This caused a problem between me and his mother. She was upset for a while. Why would she tell him this? It is not logical that my son is hit every day!"

Father, a big city

"Sometimes their father blames me saying, 'Why do you give them money? Why do you buy them so and so? Why…?' I told him that if I don't give them money, they will buy it on their own. Let them ask me for it, with my consent and in my presence. My children would come and say, 'Oh, mom, we want such and such.' I would provide those for them, or I would come one day and see them buying anything behind my back because they were used to doing so since they were young. For example, Indomie (instant noodles), I refused to buy it for them completely, so it became a forbidden fruit. When they grew up, they started confessing to me. They told me that when we had a driver, who was kind to them, they would tell him to take them to the grocery store after school, then they would buy Indomie and hide it in their bags. When they came home, they ate it. I would tell them I knew, and they said, 'How?' I said, 'From leftovers.'" (laughter).

Mother, a big city

Communication and mutual trust between children and parents

Some parents spoke about their efforts to create communication channels and safe spaces for themselves and their children to exchange views and build bridges between them by scheduling special family time each day.

"I am trying to keep the family going during this modern period. This is very important. We are used to sitting in at lunch time, and each one says what they did and what happened with them?"

Father, a medium city

"After sunset, I would ask my children what did you do at school? Why? Because when they get up the following day, they will get busy with their mobiles. There will be no chance to speak with them, so I have to ask them the day before what they did at school."

Mother of orphans, a medium city

At the same time, some parents revealed the challenges they face in communication due to the lack of dialogue between parents and children:

> "I don't ask my son—I mean, once school/work is over, everyone just gets in the car, and that's it."
>
> Mother, a small governorate

Or the emergence of technology as an obstacle and distraction. Some children and parents use mobile devices during family meetings, which creates an atmosphere of a lack of communication and poor quality time spent with the family, and the meeting is dominated by physical presence and attendance only:

> "Basically, the living room is where we gather, you know, but sometimes even when it brings us together, everyone is on their own device."
>
> Mother, a medium city

> "Because of social media, homes have lost the warmth of group sitting. Everyone almost lives on their own. We are at home, but..."
>
> Mother, a big city

Guidance and awareness of children by parents

Various parents surveyed confirmed that they constantly guide their children to teach them right from wrong, and to educate and warn them against making mistakes that could harm them or others. One of the emerging forms of guidance is by being "a role model". We can conclude from the data that some parents have the maturity and awareness, through life experiences, that children emulate their families in dealing with themselves and others. Here we provide two examples: the first is about the phenomenon of bullying, and that guiding a child who has practiced bullying is by giving them a good role model at home to learn from.

> "To be honest, speaking of bullying, the environment and home play a very important role in it. For example, a woman whose daughter was bullied by her classmate at school said: 'I can't stand the girl who bullied my daughter." When the school administration talked to the bullying girl's mother, she said, 'She's one girl who has 4 brothers.' Well, she justified her daughter's behavior for being the only girl with 4 brothers and they may bully her. What does my daughter have to do with this? It's not her fault! Let me tell you about the mother of the girl who was tormenting my daughter. When my daughter took her complaint to the Vice Principal, and the Vice Principal called the other mother, she actually said: 'My poor daughter is an only girl with four brothers. What kind of person do you expect her to be? It's hardly her fault, is it?' She justified her behavior for being one girl who has four brothers."
>
> Mother, a big city

"My children were verbally abused one time, and I intervened and communicated with the mother of the other child online. I didn't communicate with the school at all because I saw that the matter happened between the children. I contacted the mother directly, and she, frankly, abused me verbally. I felt it was better not to contact the mother directly, and the matter should have been handled through the school."

Mother, a big city

The second example is about using the mutual apology method. Apologizing is a sign of strong character, and parents owe it to their children to apologize to them when they make a mistake.

"I see when an older brother comes to a younger brother, he doesn't try to apologize clearly. Then I started telling him that the person who apologizes is confident, and that it's okay to make mistakes. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) made mistakes and Allah blamed him in the Quran. You can make mistakes. I am your mother, and I make mistakes. I have taught them that if they make a mistake, they should apologize."

Mother, a big city

Presence of mothers and fathers

The sample emphasized the importance of parents' presence in their children's lives, and the importance of children feeling their parents' presence in their lives. The sample of working mothers shared that they felt their environment sometimes expected them to be perfect, and as one of the respondents described here as **"cruel":**

"They expect you to be perfect in everything. Your children want everything from you perfectly. Your husband wants everything from you perfectly. Your family wants you to be a perfect person. They want you to study and always be happy and smiling, since the mother is the home's anchor of happiness."

Mother, a big city

Many fathers within the surveyed non-divorced families conceded that the primary responsibility for care and upbringing falls to the mother, particularly during the initial stages of the child's life. Meanwhile, the majority of mothers complained about the father's weak role in parenting and in the child's life, noting that it is limited to specific roles such as entertainment and play.

"Fathers are typically quite dependent on the mother. They rely on having a wife and older daughters, effectively lifting some of the responsibility from their shoulders. They perceive they have assistance, particularly from the mother and adult children. Consequently, it can feel like their primary role is somewhat fulfilled, leading to a degree of dependency. However, this varies, as some fathers prefer to be actively involved, while others are more dependent."

Mother, a big city

Support provided by domestic workers

More than 4.1 million domestic workers work in the Kingdom[15]. The results of the field research—although the research team did not communicate directly with domestic workers—showed that domestic workers play a significant role in children's lives, despite the different views on the limits of the domestic worker's role in childcare.

28%

of parents reported that they rely on domestic workers to stay with their children while they are busy [16].

Several parents shared their experiences with domestic workers, with a large group of mothers acknowledging the positive role played by domestic workers with their children:

> "My children spend most of their time with maids, honestly and unfortunately, but thanks to Allah the maids fear Allah and love them."
>
> Mother, a medium city

A small group of mothers in the sample expressed their desire to limit the care responsibilities of the domestic worker, believing that the role of the domestic worker should not go beyond providing cleaning and care services at home, and it should not extend to the role of a child caretaker:

> "Anything related to personal care is forbidden to be done by domestic workers."
>
> Mother, a big city

> "No, thanks to Allah. I make sure nannies know that I don't leave her (my child) with them. I never, ever leave her with nannies; it's very rare. When they are together in one room, there are cameras installed in all rooms, including the children's rooms, the playrooms, and the living room, excluding the private areas, of course. I do most of the things for my daughter, but if I need to leave her with a nanny, I use cameras. I have good domestic workers, thanks to Allah, who stay with my children, but they also know that I am in the car watching them, and I make sure they know that."
>
> Mother, a big city

15. Registered Labor Market Statistics - Q1, 2025. General Authority for Statistics.

16. The results of a SCOP's survey conducted in 2025 on a representative sample of Saudis, which was jointly funded by the KKF, Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation.

مؤسسة الملك خالد
KING KHALID FOUNDATION

A group of practitioners expressed their discontent with the increasing dominance of the domestic worker's role in the care of children, and the ensuing effect this has on the outsourcing of parental responsibility to domestic labor.

> "For example, when I sometimes send messages to families or call them, they don't respond! I think they wrote wrong phone numbers. I noticed that most of them wrote their workers' phone numbers."
>
> Practitioner in a school, a big city

> "When you ask the mother about the last time the baby was breastfed, she would say that she didn't know, meaning she is completely dependent on her nanny."
>
> Practitioner in a nursery, a big city

> "Children don't play with mom and dad; they play with nanny and the driver. I once told a child to draw mom and dad for me, he drew the nanny. She is everything to everyone in the family, and the mother acknowledges this."
>
> Teacher, a big city

> "On WhatsApp group chats, you won't find all mothers, but all nannies!! I am an Arabic teacher, and I am not obligated to send my message in English for the nanny to understand me."
>
> Early childhood teacher, a big city

Punishment method

The appropriate methods of punishment to discipline children were a source of great controversy among the sample members. The methods and means of punishment used by the surveyed parents varied. This variation is attributed to personal convictions regarding some methods of punishment, such as "beating" and other methods. However, most parents agreed that deprivation is the most effective method for all stages of childhood..

Below we review the most common methods of punishment mentioned by the sample:

◤Deprivation

Especially from beloved electronic devices, followed by deprivation from going out to meet friends and relatives or going for a walk outside the home:

> "Mother 1: For deprivation, I take their mobiles away or turn off the Internet. This is my deprivation. If I don't take mobiles away, I turn off the Internet.
>
> Mother 2: They sleep and we take their mobiles away from them.
>
> Mother 1: Oh, this is a tough punishment.
>
> Mother 2: It works very well for them."
>
> Group of mothers, a big city

▼ Ignoring

"Currently, most of my punishment is that I don't talk to my children. This is the maximum punishment for them. Ignoring and disregarding is the worst thing that can happen. I did this with the 5-year-old boy last year. He did something wrong, so I stopped talking to him. He knew why I was ignoring him without having to tell him. I didn't speak to him for two days. I perform prayers in a far mosque and go there by car, and usually take him with me, but I didn't take him these two days. When I started the car and opened the garage, I heard his voice screaming and crying. He had exploded; he had reached a point where I told his mother, "Okay, go check on him, and when I get back, we'll make up (laughter). So my method of punishment is to ignore the children."

Father, a big city

"Honestly, I've hit my son 3 or 4 times in my life. He's 5 years old now. I've hit him maybe 3 times, and I remember that they were all for one thing. Once, while we were driving in the car, he opened the door. I hit him so he would know that what he did was wrong and unacceptable. Child Protective Services called and said, 'Did you hit the child?' Wasn't it to protect him so he would learn a lesson and not repeat such act?"

Father, a city

▼ Punishment chair

"Five minutes, you're grounded. Sit on the chair and don't speak with anyone."

Mother, a medium city

▼ Reproach and blame

"I make him feel guilty."

Mother, a big city

The data also showed that parents' accumulated and repeated experiences helped them identify the most beneficial punishment for each stage of childhood and adolescence. It is worth noting that some parents repeatedly stated that they used available resources and followed the advice of childhood specialists and counselors.

"I have two sons and a little girl. There's a lecture called 'Healthy Discipline' by Heba Hariri that I listen to almost every year because the children grow up, and the age at which I want to discipline changes. So I listen to her lectures to see what age group I need to address. My older children have reached a stage where they choose their own punishments because they know the rules. If they've done something wrong, they usually choose to have all their devices removed from their rooms for a certain period. Of course, if they tell me to take the devices for a week, I take them for three or four days and then give them back."

Mother, a big city

> "Now, with social media, thanks to Allah, Google can give you any information."
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a big city

Determining the style and method of upbringing shapes the features of the child's life and affects their interaction with life experiences in all their forms, as demonstrated in the following experiences.

Saudi parents' opinions on upbringing methods

27%
of Saudis reported that beating, as a punishment method, is widespread or very widespread in society [17].

16%
of Saudis believe that severe corporal punishment in parenting will not harm the new generation of children because it did not harm the previous generation [17].

8%
of Saudis support corporal punishment as a disciplinary method.[17].

Child Welfare

A child who goes through positive experiences that reflect positively on them in different aspects of their life: Such as finding their interests, identifying their academic and professional inclinations, personal values and principles, ability to express themself and their needs, sense of security and stability, social life and friendships, and relationship with their family and relatives. The richness of childhood experiences gives the child greater depth in experiencing and interacting with life, and in expressing what is going on around them within the immediate and extended family and in society as a whole.

More importantly, experts have discovered that positive experiences can enhance children's psychological resilience when exposed to negative experiences. International experts study the preventive and mitigating benefits of having positive and adverse experiences in a child's life. These experiences protect the child from negative long-term consequences, mitigate the negative impact on their life, and build resilience for them in the future [18] (BCEs). These experiences protect the child from falling into negative long-term consequences, reduce the negative impact on their life, and build their immunity and resilience in the future. These positive experiences include having good relationships with family, friends, teachers, and neighbors; feeling included, accepted, and comfortable among them; having a disciplined routine at home for mealtimes and bedtimes; in addition to ensuring their safety, equitable treatment, proper nutrition, and providing them with the necessary medical care. These experiences contribute to creating a positive environment in which the child grows up within their family, community, and surrounding environment [19]. This research indicates that the future of children depends on successfully protecting them from bad experiences and ensuring they live a stable family life full of positive experiences.

Qualitative field analysis showed that positive experiences for children in Saudi Arabia, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds, such as poverty, orphanhood, or disabilities, provided them with the space to heal from the negative experiences they had gone through. In addition, positive experiences in many settings would enable the child to deal with negative experiences with greater confidence. Sometimes, thanks to their wealth of positive experiences, children were able to use negative experiences as motivation to create positive experiences and achieve self-realization. For example, orphaned children and their mothers showed a strong desire to transform the negative experience of losing their father into a motivation to achieve success. In this way, success itself acts as the antidote to the trauma of their bereavement:

> "Girl: I will become a surgeon, hopefully.
>
> Research team: May Allah help you achieve it.
>
> Girl: Amen, and I hope I become the person everyone asks, "How did you become a doctor?" They conduct interviews, and I tell them that being an orphan doesn't mean you become weak just because your father died. He is watching you from above. He is looking down at you now. Right now, he is watching what you do in your devotion to God. He observes—may he be among those in bliss—until the Day of Judgment, when he will truly look upon you."

Orphan girl, 12 years old, a big city

18. This abbreviation stands for **benevolent childhood experiences.**

19. Adverse and benevolent childhood experiences among adults in the United Kingdom.

▶

The following experiences emerged as the most prominent positive experiences that led to the well-being of Saudi children, and this chapter will review them in detail. Analysis from the perspective of positive experiences shows that small details in a child's life have big implications, such as getting them ready for school, preparing healthy meals, allocating time for family, scheduling regular mealtimes at home, listening to them, and the parents' presence with the child in their daily routine.

1 Sports	**2** Family time and family communication
3 Association programs and their impact on creating positive childhood experiences	**4** Volunteering experience
5 Friendship experience	**6** The experience of going to the supermarket
7 Income level and its impact on children's experiences	**8** VISION 2030 KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA Impact of the Kingdom's Vision 2030

We share the observation of the research team that conducts individual interviews with the children: children who can express themselves during the interview enjoy a highly stable life and positive experiences. Several children in the sample were found to be unable to express themselves. The research team concluded that the children were unable to answer the researchers' questions because they either did not have an answer or had not thought about the question before. Often, this group of children appeared to be indifferent.

Analysis from the perspective of positive experiences shows that small details in a child's life have big implications, such as getting them ready for school, preparing healthy meals, allocating time for family, scheduling regular mealtimes at home, listening to them, and the parents' presence with the child in their daily routine.

> "Research team: How do your mom and dad help you in the morning?
>
> Girl: They prepare breakfast for me and prepare the clothes I will wear. Then, I go to get dressed and ready, and they chat with me and I leave."
>
> Girl, 11 years old, a big city

Looking closely at this girl's life, for example, all of her answers revealed that she had positive experiences on a daily basis, and her answers to the questions were profound in terms of her level of awareness and the presence of her parents in her life, despite her young age. She expressed her family's deep connection with her, and spoke about her parents' refusal to let her ask the domestic worker, or as she called it, "domestic helper," for her needs, and that the helper's role was only to take care of the home, not to care for her or her siblings.

> "Research team: What is your relationship like with her (the domestic worker)?
>
> Girl: My mom tells me not to talk to her, I don't want to get to know her."
>
> "Research team: Do you actually feel that this opinion (the bullying opinion of the children at school about her) has affected you?
>
> Girl: No, it didn't affect me because my family members support me, like my mom, dad and siblings, so I wasn't upset.
>
> Research team: How do they support you?
>
> Girl: The first thing I do when I get back is to tell my mom and dad about what happened, and then I tell my brother about what happened.
>
> Research team: And how do they support you?
>
> Girl: They tell me: "You are strong, tell the supervisor, tell the teacher."
>
> Girl, 11 years old, a big city

Sports

It was striking how children from different backgrounds shared an interest in sports and expressed it as a positive and enjoyable experience that provided them with many psychological and moral benefits, with a noticeable and increasing passion for football among both genders of children. The sample showed a widespread interest in the hobby of playing football between both genders and interest in it among children of different age groups:

> "[I want to be] a football player." I just play, I move around a lot for it—this has been my hobby since I was a child. Now I'm joining a club."

Orphan, 15 years old, Najran

> "I love playing football and I even play at a club on Wednesdays and Thursdays. My role on the team is a goalkeeper."

Girl, 10 years old, Dhahran

> "Honestly, I love football. I am obsessed with it. Sometimes I even play it with my brother in the street."

Girl, 12 years old, Hafr Al Batin

> "[My children love] football, they play it, they love it. I enrolled them in an academy. Football is their hobby. Actually, it was initially just a way to release energy, but I discovered it's a hobby they really love."

Mother, Najran

> "I want to become a football player. Hopefully, this will happen and I will become the most famous player."

Orphan, 11 years old, Riyadh

> "Boy: I love drawing and playing football."

Boy with a disability, 17 years old, Riyadh

A group of children expressed their desire to pursue professional football careers in the future and chart a career path for themselves in this field:

> "Research team: What are your ambitions for the future? What do you want to be?
>
> T: "I want to become a football player." A 15-year-old male teenager, Althanyh
>
> "Boy: I would love to join Barcelona, a European club. I really like seeing myself as a football player.
>
> Research team: Do you have the ambition to become a professional football player?
>
> Boy: I have ambition, and I won't give up on it no matter what."
>
> Male teenager, 18 years old, Baydha

Noting the prevalence of children describing themselves as "athletes" as part of their personality traits and their identity:

> "Yes, since I am an athlete and I love sports, I like to go to the club."
>
> Girl, 13 years old, Riyadh

Parents expressed a desire to provide more opportunities for children to practice sports, especially football, by providing playgrounds and academies specifically for children:

> "Mother: My kids love football, for example, but there isn't a good, suitable club. There is a club, but it's not suitable for them.
>
> Research team: Why don't they play at the school?
>
> Mother: No, the school hasn't a football pitch too."
>
> Mother, a small village

> "Mother: We don't go to football academies. Research Team: Really? T: I went there once. Research team: Why? T: No money. Research team: Do academies require money? T: Yes, 300 or 400 riyals."
>
> Boy, 15 years old, a village

> "T: There are sports, but there is no gym. However, the teacher played games with us many times over during lessons."
>
> Girl, 15 years old, Al-Namas

On the other hand, some parents expressed displeasure with the focus and promotion of football among children, and they wished that other sports and hobbies, such as swimming, horseback riding, handball, etc., were provided. From the perspective of these parents, football is not safe, and has great risks and some violence that does not appeal to everyone.

> "A few mothers and I agreed to hire a chess coach. 4-5 children at most will meet every week, and the coach will work with them through certain levels and organize leagues and matches between them. At my son's previous school, there was a mother, may Allah bless her, who started a wonderful book club initiative. We really miss initiatives like this."
>
> Mother, a big city

Sport also emerged as an activity and a tool to help cope after a crisis or trauma, and it was more widespread among vulnerable groups, such as orphans and those with limited income:

> "I've enrolled my children in clubs, and I was concerned to do so after their father's death. The idea was to have a sporting activity that would help them get out of their grief. I wanted them to be occupied with a sport that would benefit them physically and mentally. It would build their muscles and, at the same time, allow them to release energy. In addition, the clubs created a community for them and greatly increased their self-confidence."
>
> Widow, big city

> "We honestly wish that sports clubs would at least provide seats for orphans because the fees they charge are very high."
>
> Widow, big city

At the same time, the experience of excelling in various sports, despite the difficult living conditions or limited living situation, had a positive impact on psychological well-being and self-confidence, and provided an opportunity to stand out among peers and in society.

> "No, my son was enrolled in karate and he was among the top performers."
>
> Mother supporting a low-income family, a medium governorate

Family time and family communication

The relationship between mothers and fathers in front of their children has an effect on creating a sense of security, according to what practitioners, parents, and the children themselves have reported in more than one location and in different ways. The field research form included a question about the concept of safety for parents. Respondents usually pause a little at this question and think deeply about the answer to it. Parents have repeatedly believed that a child's sense of security is linked to the mother and father and their relationship with their children in terms of providing a safe space to listen to them and communicate with them:

"If the mother listens to her child with her heart, meaning she understands them, and if the child sees the mother and father in the same house and sees a relationship of respect between them, then they will feel safe and nothing will scare them."

Mother of a boy with a disability, Riyadh

"They (my parents) are safety valves for me."

Mother, a big city

"A child is secure when their parents are close to them and they feel their compassion, and that they give them a sense of security. This is what security means. We all know about the other things like food, clothing, or anything else, but the most important thing for children is security."

Father of a separated family, a medium city

"When our child is brave enough to tell us or his father anything that bothers him, maybe something he's afraid of, when nothing scares him, and he has the courage and the ability to tell me, I'll then feel comfortable that

Research team: he's reached the security stage."

Parent 3: When he reveals what is inside him."

Mother, a small city

Another expression that has emerged among parents regarding the concept of security for the child is embodied in the child's feeling that they are accepted in all circumstances, whether they are wrong or right:

"I believe that security is reached when a child sees a strong and stable mother who can give, accept, and love them in all their states. I think this is security, in addition to a stable family. Of course, stability is very important. I mean that problems shouldn't reach the child, and they should feel stable and loved all the time."

Mother, a big city

One of the practices that positively impacts the creation of opportunities to build positive childhood experiences is the practice of allocating specific time for children, which we have discussed previously in the parenting section, and here we discuss its impact on the child's well-being experience:

> "For example, we have a day once or twice a month, on Saturdays, when I, my husband, and the children go out to a coffee shop from afternoon until night together. We have dinner, go for a walk, whatever. This is a day dedicated to us, so thanks to Allah, I and my husband are in agreement on this."
>
> Mother, a medium city

Similarly, some families allocate time with the working father or mother during the day:

> "All of them, even my little girl (name of the child), I leave her with my husband every day, three or four times a week. I mean, she spends time with him, fed by him, and sits with him at night, but not on weekends."
>
> Mother, a medium city

We have previously examined how mothers and fathers define a child's sense of security. Now, we will explore specific experiences that parents took the time to share, believing they held significant educational value. These experiences were characterized by the mothers and fathers as a deep, consistent connection with both parents concerning complex life matters. This involved parents actively listening to their children without emotional outbursts, giving them room to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions, and making the children feel completely safe while doing so. This process boosts the child's self-esteem and confidence in their family, fostering a lasting sense of stability and acceptance.

> "Mother1: I don't like strictness, and I've never lived in a strict family. I always saw that daughters of strict families were either fed up or found a way to release their pent-up energy. I absolutely hate being strict. I let my daughter talk to me, even about her deepest feelings, and I talk to her about private and profound things. Sometimes I tell her: 'Stop it, you're in your second year of high school, you're going too far!' Even though she says, "Okay, Mom, what's wrong?" I like it when she lets me know about all her feelings, and what she likes and dislikes. She opens up about all her feelings to me. She doesn't hide anything from me on her phone, and sometimes when she's at school, I open it to see who she's messaging and who she's befriending online.
>
> Research team: Does she know that you're accessing her phone?
>
> "Mother1: "Yes, she knows and introduces me to her online friends. For example, she met a friend in Riyadh, and I saw her, and we went together to a coffee shop. That's good, to let me know everything she likes."
>
> Mother, a medium city

"Lunchtime is what brings us together, like on exam days, for example, when you won't have enough time to sit with your family and chat with them, or when you come back from school. I'm a student, and my brother is a student. So, I see families who, for example, order lunch and then everyone eats in their own room, and then one of them says: 'No, I'm going to sleep now, leave me alone, I'll eat later without you,' and so on. This is a very bad thing nowadays, and many families do it. Later on, your family will be the place where you feel most comfortable, the place that embraces you. It means you won't spend much time with them or strengthen your bonds with them."

Girl, 13 years old, a big city

"I'm close to my mom. Sometimes she's tired from work, and I tell her everything that happens to me. Honestly, I don't hide anything from my family because, thanks to Allah, my mom trusts me. She says to me: 'I am your mother, I am like your sister, your friend.' I feel she is everything to me, and I actually tell her everything that happened to me. Sometimes she tells me: 'This is wrong, or this is right.' Maybe I experience a situation for the first time, and she might tell me: 'Yes, no, that was right, or that was wrong." She helps me as soon as I get home, of course, and we sit with the family, have lunch, and everyone says what happened with them."

Girl, 15 years old, a big city

"Girl: My mom is closer.

Research team: Your mother is closer. What do you talk about with your mom?

Girl: About my life and my worries sometimes.

Research team: Do you always receive support from your mom when you talk to her about your worries?

Girl: Sure.

Research team: Does she help you a lot, or sometimes she gives you solutions that you're not convinced by them?

Girl: "No. She helps me and I can't imagine life without her."

Female teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

41

The children and their parents talked about family activities that revive the spirit of friendship among family members and form a meaningful recreational experience for them as a family, such as tea time, coffee time, playing together, and other activities that the family members participate in:

> "We are professionals at it. The whole house plays carrom. We always play it after sunset. We always gather and we all play carrom on a square board at our house after sunset until Ishaa (the evening) prayer. This is a family gathering, and time for chatting, coffee, and laughter. It's great. You see me and my parents, you'd think we're siblings. We're very close. But when it comes to serious matters, thank Allah, we're serious and we understand each other. That's what we do during the period between sunset and Ishaa prayer. It is a gathering where we all get together in the living room, chatting and talking. Its time for entertainment, laughter, and chatting."
>
> Orphan boy, 16 years old, a medium city

These activities also include allocating mealtimes for spending time and connecting with family members:

> "Male teenager: Wherever you are, you must come, eat, and then leave.
>
> Research team: Amazing! What is the meal?
>
> Male teenager: The meal plan consists of three meals: breakfast, dinner, and supper."
>
> Male teenager, 16 years old, a medium city

Reasons why children do not participate in activity and hobby centers [20]
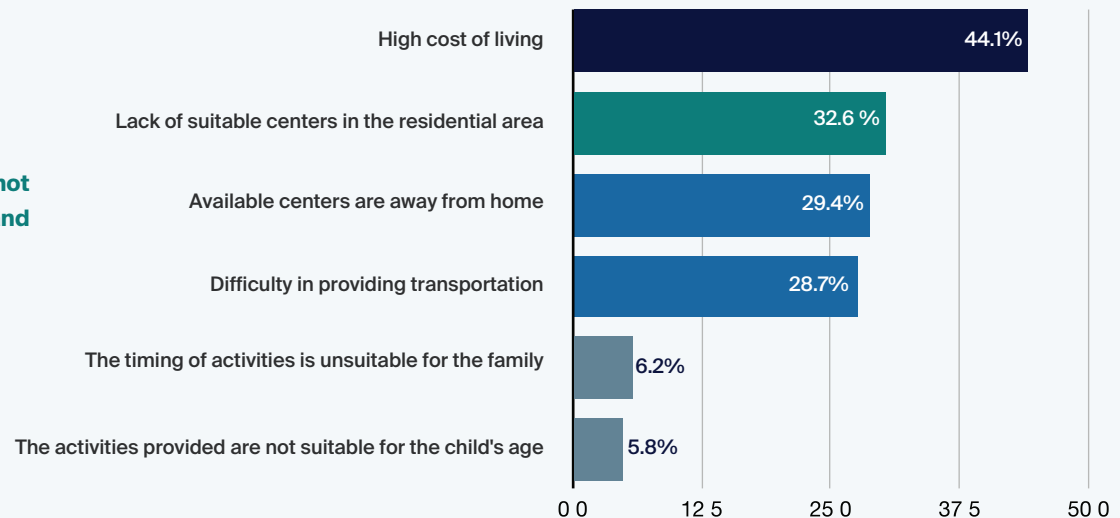
Reason	Percentage
High cost of living	44.1%
Lack of suitable centers in the residential area	32.6 %
Available centers are away from home	29.4%
Difficulty in providing transportation	28.7%
The timing of activities is unsuitable for the family	6.2%
The activities provided are not suitable for the child's age	5.8%

20. A SCOP's survey was conducted on a representative sample of Saudis, which was jointly funded by the KKF, Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation.

56%

of the parents reported that their children are not enrolled in any center that provides cultural or recreational activities to learn a hobby or to meet children outside school.[20]
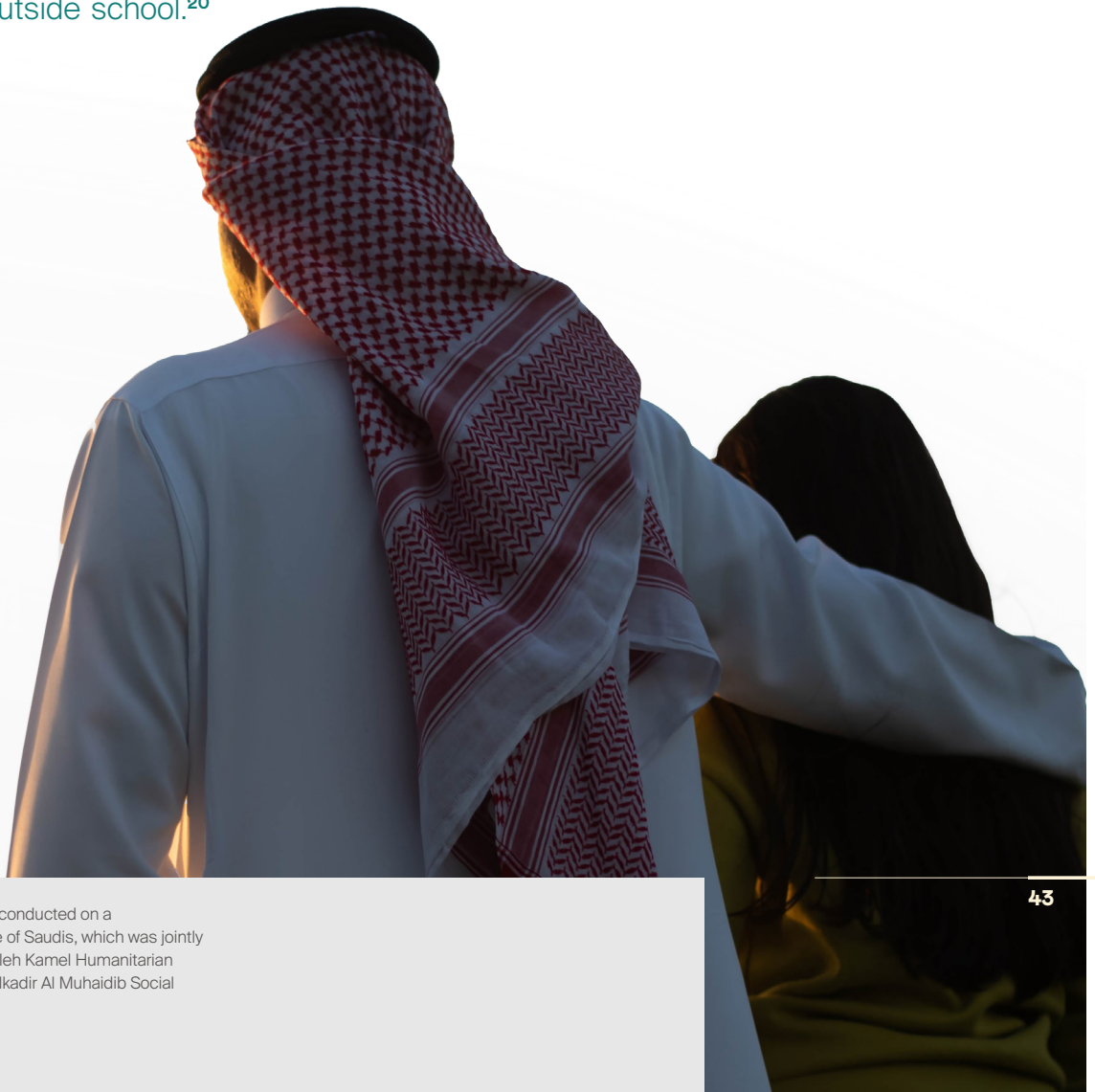
20. A SCOP's survey was conducted on a representative sample of Saudis, which was jointly funded by the KKF, Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation.

Association programs and their impact on creating positive childhood experiences

The research methodology, which relied heavily on reaching children, especially the most needy ones, through associations and their beneficiaries, may have contributed significantly to achieving this result. [21] However, it is difficult to overlook the impact that associations have in creating positive childhood experiences. We will review the most prominent features of their impact in the following points:

▼ Supporting children in shaping their life and future paths:

> "We took courses (at the association)." "They have benefited us in many ways, teaching us how to achieve our future path, how to take the right path, and how to manage our lives."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

> "Female child: (name of the association) organized the (name of the program). All the lectures talked about self-confidence, self-care, and economic and psychological fields, etc. I liked it because I love education. I'm that kind of person who is keen to learn and understand life and the world."
>
> Orphan girl, 12 years old, a big city

▼ Helping children recognize their feelings, build positive relationships, and make children and adolescents feel that someone listens to them, appreciates their feelings, and offers them support and advice, especially among adolescents.

> "Female teenager: For example, with a lesson on love, I learned how to control love. I stopped loving anyone quickly, because I have to know many things first before giving anyone a chance.
>
> Orphan girl, 12 years old, a big city

> "Female teenager: "I learned about communicating with people, using body language and gestures, and how will the university be different from the current stage of high school?"
>
> Female teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

▼ Boosting self-confidence and encouraging social engagement:

> "Research team: What of this program has affected you the most? What has it developed in you, what have you noticed, or what changes have you experienced within yourself?
>
> Beneficiary: I was anxious about social life in the first and second years of middle school.
>
> Female teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

21. To review the complete scientific methodology adopted by the research report,

▶

▼ Integrating vulnerable groups of children into the fabric of society and providing them with opportunities to introduce themselves. The most prominent of these categories in terms of benefit is the category of children with disabilities:

> "(name of the association) did not fall short with us. Every three days, my son has to come and attend and integrate with the community. The men's section is keen that he must integrate with the community after they learned about the situation. All of them, may Allah give them strength, deal with him like their parents. I once saw an employee hugging him. I swear to Allah, his sisters and I cried because of the way they dealt with my son. May Allah give them strength and reward them."
>
> Mother of an orphaned child with disabilities, Najran

▼ Skill development:

> "T: She taught me about the program, events, and free courses. When I saw free courses with accredited certificates, I immediately came to enroll myself because that was better than to pay money.
>
> Research team: What did you benefit from the most?
>
> T: Honestly, after they gave us courses and books, I started collecting and reviewing the books myself.
>
> "Research team: What are their topics and what are they about?
>
> T: How to choose your major, how to build yourself up, how to strengthen your character, and so on."
>
> Male teenager, 15 years old, Bisha

▼ Enriching the summer vacation period:

> "During the summer, there was a program called Identity Cubes. I remember it taught me to be a confident person, build my personality, and so on. In addition, there were fun physical activities. I think I was in elementary school when I participated in it. I have been participating in it for about 4 years now, thanks to Allah, and I have not stopped at being a beneficiary with them, but I have volunteered with them more than once, especially during the time of COVID-19. For example, I presented two programs with them entitled 'I am a successor on Earth' and 'Money does not grow on trees'. It is a very enjoyable and amazing experience, honestly.
>
> Male teenager, 15 years old, Bisha

Volunteering experience

In addition to the impact of associations on children, we find that the experience of volunteering has appeared positively among children. Some children shared their experience of joining volunteer opportunities and the impact these opportunities had on them in providing chances for self-discovery and identifying interests:

> "I volunteered at the Red Crescent and at the youth hostel in several places... I discovered that I love medicine. When I volunteered at the Red Crescent, there was blood pressure and sugar measurements. I sat and learned from the nurses who were measuring, and the experience was enjoyable."
>
> Orphan girl, 17 years old, a medium city

The experience of volunteering provided children with a sense of value and added meaning to life:

> "T: I also discovered the value of volunteering. I used to see volunteering as just putting in effort and not taking anything in return. I offered something and wanted the moral reward... I discovered that although there is no profit, there is a secondary gain; I was experiencing a field where I felt like I was a person who had contributed something, you understand what I mean."
>
> Female teenager of a limited income family, 17 years old, a small village

Friendship experience

Although many of the children in the sample spoke negatively about their friendship experience, a portion of the sample had a positive experience of friendship. The most important aspect of this experience is the enhancement of children's self-confidence and their sense of being loved by others, which enables them to withstand feelings of self-doubt and inferiority:

> "I didn't have any friends, and I was a little sad. Without friends, I sometimes felt like I was making mistakes in the questions the teacher gave me, and I would say, 'Oh, I'm a little stupid,' and so on, and I would hit myself. But when I got friends, I felt relieved. I feel like they love me, and if they love me, I deserve to love myself."
>
> Girl, 10 years old, Dhahran

In addition to mentioning friendship as a mechanism for coping with negative bullying experiences at school and building self-confidence:

> "I had absolutely no personality, and I was a coward who would just cry if someone said anything to me. But there are two friends I love and cherish very much. They taught me not to worry about girls and that they do things to scare me, and I shouldn't be afraid of them. I became a strong girl and no one can say anything to me."
>
> Girl, 13 years old, Najran

The experience of going to the supermarket

Regardless of the results, whether it was buying unhealthy food or enjoying shopping, the experience of going to the supermarket emerged as a positive experience that children enjoy and that means a lot to them in their communication with their parents, especially the father, who was the most involved in this experience, according to the field research sample. For children, going to the supermarket is a reward or a fun outing with their siblings or friends, during which they spend their free time:

> "Research team: Where do you go out together?
>
> Girl: We walk to the square that is close to us. It has Anas Mosque, and there are many people in it. We walk around it and pass by the supermarket, and eat and sit down.
>
> Girl, 11 years old, Tabuk

> Where do you like to go for a walk? In the park, the supermarket, and shopping. Everybody loves shopping like Mr. Waltrands and Abu Khamsa. I buy school supplies from them."
>
> Boy, 8 years old, Riyadh

> "My mom takes us to the supermarket to buy things, and then we sit with my sisters and chat."
>
> Girl, 11 years old, Bisha

> "I can't deprive them of going to the supermarket, they love it. It might cost two thousand a month sometimes, but I say to my children: 'It's okay, so that you can live and be happy.' It doesn't bother me."
>
> Mother supporting a low-income family, Hafr Al Batin

The experience of going to the supermarket was linked to the role of the father. Among the sample of orphans who had lost their father, mothers expressed their keenness to take their children to the supermarket so that they would not feel deficient or miss this experience due to the absence of the father, whether because he had passed away or due to divorce and separation of the parents.

Income level and its impact on children's experiences

Regarding income level and its relationship to the positive experiences children go through, it was necessary to look at the situation of children in high-income families compared to children in low-income families. It is clear that the experiences are diverse and varied.

Starting with low-income families, they have different characteristics, including the hardship of living and the lack of a comfortable financial situation for the family. However, there are multiple positive experiences expressed by the sample within these families, related to the parents' interest in their children and their keenness on the children's academic achievement, and on the children enjoying positive experiences as much as possible.

The sample showed characteristics of parents in low-income families, including poor educational levels of mothers or fathers. Here we share some quotes from illiterate mothers of low-income families who were able to overcome their educational challenges in supporting their children in the educational process:

> "My neighbor's daughter is in the same grade as my daughter. I make her come to study with my daughter in front of my eyes. I prepare the study atmosphere for them. I communicate with the teacher continuously to know how my daughter is doing. If her level improves, then that's great. I tell her to rely on herself. I don't neglect the Quran at all."
>
> Mother, a low-income family, a medium governorate

Through dedication, communication, and the use of online educational platforms, this mother was able to help her children become academically   successful:

> "My children were honored at school. My eldest son, his teacher (name) said to him: 'I want to know who taught you.' My son replied: 'My mother taught us at home.' His teacher said: 'You were taught better than me. So, I believe that the mother's role is very important."
>
> Mother, a low-income family, a medium governorate

Single mothers faced double challenges in balancing income and raising children. Some mothers were able to achieve this balance and find suitable job opportunities through which they could prioritize their children's well-being over earning a living:

> "
>
> "I used to work before at (name of a shop). I used to work from 2 pm until about 11:30 pm. I would leave and come back late at night. Imagine, during that time, my son and daughter were teenagers. After about a year and two months, I sat with myself and said, 'A year and two months have passed, where am I with my children?' Improving their lives during this period requires someone close to them. I was busy trying to secure a future for them. We weren't financially secure at that time. I was busy, and I felt like it would get really difficult after that. I got a job as a secretary at a company, with good working hours from morning until afternoon. As soon as they came from school, I was at home. It was easier. But after that, I felt that work took me away a little because I had to be with them 24 hours a day, to be close, especially because they were teenagers and needed my attention. At that time, I had to be closer to them than their lifelong friends."
>
> Mother supporting a low-income family, a medium city

As for well-off families, they were able to provide multiple and different experiences of sports and recreational activities through private schools or by involving children in clubs and extracurricular activities. However, parents in this category are still dissatisfied with the lack of available opportunities and the high prices of activities, in line with the observation of families from the rest of the income categories.

Impact of the Kingdom's Vision 2030

The ambitious goals outlined in the Kingdom's Vision 2030, and the successive changes that Saudi Arabia is witnessing as a result in various parts of the Kingdom, have positively impacted children's experiences and their optimistic outlook on life and the future. Although the research team did not directly ask the children about the Kingdom's Vision 2030, but rather about their expectations for the next 20 years, the children readily expressed the vision and its impact on their lives in ways that greatly reflected the weight of the vision's programs and projects and its impact on the lives of Saudi children.

> "[After 20 years] I feel that every city will be developed, and that Saudi Arabia will be the richest country in the world."
>
> Girl, 13 years old, Al-Namas

> "If you go into the supermarket, everything you find in it is Saudi."
>
> Girl, 15 years old, Al-Namas

> "Research team: What's one thing you expect to happen?
>
> Girl: The NEOM project to be done.
>
> Research team: Do you like this project?
>
> Girl: Yes, because it's free of things that harm people; there's no transportation."
>
> Orphan girl, 14 years old, Al Wajh

> "Saudi Arabia is becoming something big, something new that has never happened in the world. Something unprecedented."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, Al-Ahsa

> "I am very happy. I want to live as long as I can so that I can see the development and the wonderful things that are happening."
>
> Female teenager, 16 years old, Tabuk

> "Girl: A huge development. We'll become so advanced that we might not even need our phones anymore... I mean, we'll just read screens in front of us for an hour or so, that's what I expect."
>
> Orphan, 17 years old, Najran

"There will be wonderful things in 2030 and 2034. The World Cup will have fantastic stadiums, and Saudi Arabia will be the number one destination for tourists."

Orphan girl, 17 years old, Najran

"Girl: For example, in restaurants, the waiter who comes to see what we want will change to a robot; and instead of hiring a taxi driver, we will ride in a taxi driven by an electronic system; and homes will be electronic; and instead of hiring a maid to clean for us, we will replace her with robots that know how to clean, thus reducing the number of foreign workers and benefiting from technology."

Female teenager, 15 years old, Mashalia

"I see myself as an entrepreneur. I have liked entrepreneurship since I was 10 years old. I now have my own store. I wish I will be known for entrepreneurship one day. I have several projects that I am working on, and I hope they will be successful. I see myself as someone who has achieved something. I want to make changes in the world. I want to make a positive change. I want to leave my mark one day."

Female teenager, 17 years old, Dhahran

IV Sedentary Lifestyle

The child wellbeing experience demonstrated the significant importance of positive experiences and an active lifestyle in shaping a child life. Based on field research, children also experience a sedentary lifestyle. The term "sedentary lifestyle" for children refers to what they have expressed regarding limited activities and events, feelings of boredom and weariness, loss of desire to express themselves, and the adoption of negative behaviors, such as poor nutrition, staying up late, social isolation, and apathy. It is usually a lifestyle pattern that extends to the family as a whole due to the spread of bad habits among members of society and weak parenting and supervision.

Several children in the sample were found to be unable to express themselves. The research team concluded that the children were unable to answer the researchers' questions because they either did not have an answer or had not thought about the question before. Often, this group of children appeared to be indifferent.

> "Research team: What do you do at home? Child: I just pick up my phone and go to sleep."
>
> Boy, 11 years old, a medium governorate

Under this theme, we will discuss 4 patterns:

1 Staying up late

2 Malnutrition

3 Absence from school

4 Apathy and social isolation behaviors
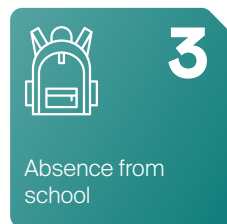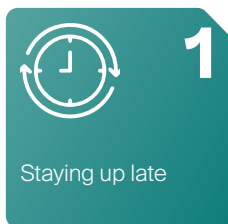
Staying up late

The issue of staying up late emerged in the qualitative data, with children, parents, and practitioners reporting a widespread phenomenon of staying up late among children. The most common issue among children regarding staying up late was their irregular sleep patterns. A group of children shared the practice of "staying up" and not getting enough rest:

> "Honestly, I didn't sleep well and today I almost fainted in class."
>
> Female teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

> "I don't sleep at night. Sometimes my sleep is not good. It's messed up like right now, I've been up since morning. I go straight to bed [after school] and don't wake up until dinner or sunset."
>
> Female teenager, a medium governorate

Many teachers spoke about the signs of sleep deprivation and its effect on students during the morning hours at school:

> "Approximately 3-4 [students] sleep almost as soon as they get back from school. They get up at sunset and stay up on electronic devices, Sony for example... He stays up all night and comes to school exhausted."
>
> Male teacher, a big city

A large group of parents expressed their displeasure with their children's behaviors of staying up late and isolating from the family:

> "Their absence is greater than their presence. Their sleep schedule is messed up; if they sleep during the day, for example, they stay up all night. This might be the reason why they don't go to school.
>
> Mother, a small village

A large number of children prefer to stay up late for various reasons, including escaping the home routine and seeking their own private space:

> "I like to wake up at 4. When I wake up at 4, there's nothing to do, no chores like on the weekend. You can play and relax. You can learn new things. My friend wakes up at 5 and I wake up at 4. I talk to him at 5 on Teams and we play together. The PlayStation game time is from 4 to 5. We go to the store to play. There is a playroom there, and if I was hungry I'd get a snack at 4 am."
>
> Boy, a big city

Practitioners emphasize the dangers of staying up late for children, especially since their growth is linked to their sleep during the night:

> "A scientific study showed that staying up late is one of the factors that inhibit growth hormones. Staying up late is common during this period. It happens a lot."
>
> Practitioner in a large city

52% of Saudis believe that leaving children under the age of **10** alone without companions is widespread or very widespread in the Kingdom.

Surv

59% of Saudis believe that allowing a child to stay up late and continue without sleep during school days until morning is a widespread or very widespread phenomenon in society.

Next Generation of Saudis
Childhood in Saudi Arabia

69% of Saudis believe that allowing teenagers under the age of **16**to drive is widespread or very widespread in society.

22

22. A SCOP's survey conducted in 2025 on a representative sample of Saudis, which was jointly funded by the KKF, Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation.

Malnutrition

Nutrition is not just about fulfilling a human need and a biological process that the human body goes through. For children, it is a major determinant of their identity, personality, and lifestyle by preferring some meals over others. Children in Saudi Arabia face a significant challenge regarding nutrition and food preferences. Quantitative indicators speak of it, and the experiences of the children included in this study confirm it. **Child malnutrition is measured through 4 key indicators to understand the overall health and nutritional status of the population:** [23]

Stunting	It measures height for age and is an indicator that reflects the consequences of malnutrition before and after birth, as well as exposure to diseases and infections in children and the child's limited ability to grow healthily. These children are at risk of infection and death.
Wasting	It measures weight for height and is an indicator that directly shows the child's poor nutrition, and as a result, the child is exposed to multiple risks, the most important of which is weakening the body's immunity to fight diseases, which may lead to death.
Underweight	It measures weight for height (for children under five) and weight for body mass (for children over five), and it leads to disease and prevents children from benefiting from their physical and cognitive potential.
Overweight	It measures weight for height and body mass. Overweight and obesity in children can lead to early-onset chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and even an increased risk of cancer and bone diseases.

WHO, in collaboration with UNICEF and the World Bank, monitors these indicators through what is known as the Global Nutrition Monitoring Framework.

Comparison table of 2022 stunting rates worldwide[24]

The rate is considered very low if it is less than 2.5%; low if it is between 2.5% and 10%; medium if it is between 10% and less than 20%; high if it is between 20% and less than 30%; very high if it is equal to or greater than 30%

India	Globally	KSA	Argentina	Brazil	USA	Australia
30.9%	**22.3%**	**١٢.٤٥٪**	**9.5%**	**7.2%**	**3.6%**	**3.4%**
Very high	High	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Low

There is a difference in the rate among the G20 countries, with the indicator in the Kingdom remaining at average levels that can be improved by encouraging dietary diversification for children and mothers.

23. The official page for indicators of malnutrition in children on the WHO website

►

24. UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank, **"Child nutrition levels and trends"**

►

Comparison table of 2022 wasting rates worldwide [25]

Less than 2.5% is very low; between 2.5% and 5% is low; between 5% and less than 10% is medium; between 10% and less than 15% is high; 15% or more is very high

India	Globally	KSA	South Africa	Japan	Argentina	Mexico	Australia
18.7%	6.8%	4.4%	3.8%	2.3%	1.7%	1.7%	0.2%
Very high	Medium	Low	Low	Very low	Low	Low	Very low
		For 2020					

It is noteworthy that most G20 countries have low rates for this indicator, with the Kingdom having the opportunity to reduce the rate by improving maternal and child nutrition patterns, and it is important to update the data for this indicator after 5 years from its last update. This rate has witnessed a steady decrease globally by 11% between 2012 and 2024. [26]

Comparison table of 2022 weight gain rates among children (under 5 years old) worldwide.[27]

Less than 2.5% is very low; between 2.5-5% is low; between 5-10% is medium; between 10-15% is high; 15% or more is very high

Australia	KSA	China	USA	Mexico	Globally	India	Japan
21.8%	10.1%	8.9%	7.9%	6.9%	5.6%	2.8%	2.1%
Very high	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low

It should be noted that the indicator is high in Saudi Arabia for children between 2 and 14 years old, according to data from the General Authority for Statistics for 2024, where the rate of overweight among children reached 33% and the rate of obesity in this age group reached 14.6% [28]. This indicates that obesity and overweight are the biggest concerns regarding children's health in the Kingdom.

In a survey conducted by the King Khalid Foundation with joint funding from the Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation [29] for understanding dietary diversification in Saudi Arabia, the findings showed that half of Saudis across different age groups do not maintain an appropriate dietary diversification.[30]. This affects the levels of micronutrients, vitamins, and minerals in the body, and has significant implications for children's nutrition. A group of practitioners in the field research sample reported that many children lacked knowledge of some food groups:

> "The quality of food is not very bad, but it is very unhealthy. Fast food contains fats and sugars. Most of the time, people eat sugar or fats and such fast food. Some of them don't even know what a salad is, and they neither know nor accept it, even though they have never tasted it in their lives. So, all their food is unhealthy."
>
> Male family development specialist in a medium governorate

25. UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank, **"Child nutrition levels and trends"**

26. United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) 2025,**The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025**

27. UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank, **"Child nutrition levels and trends"**

28. Leena Baghdadi, Afnan Younis, Hessah Al Suwaidan, Marwah Hassounah, and Reem Al Khalifah (2021), **"Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown on Routine Childhood Immunization: A Saudi Nationwide Cross-Sectional Study"**

29. A survey jointly funded by the KKF and the Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, conducted by Gallup, surveyed a random sample of 8,500 households, covering at least 500 families in each administrative region in 2024. "

30. Percentage of Saudi adult males and females who consume the scientifically recommended dietary diversification by consuming five scientifically defined food groups according to the DQQ All-5 Indicator methodology.

The sample of parents in the qualitative research confirms the existence of difficulties faced by parents, especially mothers, in providing, offering, and convincing children to eat healthy and good food. Some mothers described their children as being picky eaters. Most parents from different groups and regions agreed that children have a strong love for instant noodles, Indomie, despite the parents' knowledge and awareness that it is an unhealthy food.

> "If we're talking about nutrition, it's zero for my child.
>
> My little child has zero nutrition.
>
> He only eats bread."
>
> Mother, a big city

> "But most of them eat Indomie, because it is a sacred meal for us."
>
> Mother, a big city

Some mothers spoke about the impact of poor nutrition on their children's health, and their understanding of it as being related to eating outside the home versus eating at home, and not necessarily to the type and quality of food, regardless of where it was cooked:

> "I've become worried about their health because of high cholesterol. It's not good to make my kids suffer from it. I discovered it was because of eating out, and because of my job. I've been working anything for three years."
>
> Mother, a big city

A group of parents complained that their children were refusing to eat, but for no clear reasons:

> "Now, my child doesn't ask for food unless she's hungry, and sometimes she doesn't eat lunch or anything at all."
>
> Mother, a medium city

> "[My daughters] have their breakfast with difficulty. "I try to convince my daughter to eat eggs and drink milk. She has to eat breakfast, and she can't go out without eating. I would tell her: 'It's up to you! Your breath will smell bad, nobody will like you,...'"
>
> Mother, a medium city

Absence from school

According to UNESCO, the gross enrollment rate in primary education in Saudi Arabia reached 102%. Saudi Arabia is among the top-performing countries in this indicator at the level of the G20 countries. In addition, the overall rate of primary education completion reached 120%. However, the overall rate of primary education completion in the Kingdom is 99.1% according to the GASTAT data for 2024. [31] Qualitative field research data revealed a phenomenon of absenteeism across all educational levels, with Thursday repeatedly identified as the day with the highest rate of school absences in the various cities and regions visited by the research team:

> "We take Thursday off."
>
> Mother of orphans, a big city

> "We don't go to school every Thursday."
>
> Child, 11 years old, a medium city

Even when the child and their parents are willing to attend school on Thursdays, reality does not allow them to learn during the day:

> "There's no one at the school, no one attends. Every Thursday, nobody comes to school. I go to school on Thursdays sometimes and don't find anyone."
>
> Male teenager, 14 years old, a medium city

Some teachers made their observations regarding the decline in student attendance, increased absenteeism, and parents' acceptance of this situation:

> "I've noticed that absenteeism has increased significantly over the past three terms. From what I've observed, after this 3-term system was applied, the students have been taking the same break every week. This was the first week we returned to school; most of the students were absent. 14 or 15 out of 40 students are present. I think this is a disaster, honestly. I expected that after the 3-term system was applied, the study would become very, very long for them. Unlike when the 2-term system was applied, the rate of absence was not very high; we didn't notice much absence. I also think that parents are unaware of absenteeism and don't take it seriously. Although the ministry has issued warnings, there's a bit of laxity regarding absences."
>
> Teacher, a big city

31. GASTAT, Education and
    Training Statistics for 2024

    ➤

As for parents, most of them admitted to encouraging their children to be absent on Thursdays:

"To be honest, we always don't admit Thursdays (as schooldays), haha. As a working mother, I get tired, and I feel like I reward myself when I make my children miss school, to be honest. Not every week. Last week, they were exceptionally sick. But every Thursday, because I am an employee and the older daughter is with me in the same school, and the second daughter is in a school next to the school where I work. I know the teachers in that school and they are my colleagues. Most of the class will be absent, so why would I let her go to school, and we meet in the end (of the school day). I started to enjoy it when it happened. Actually, my colleagues would say: 'Why do come on (name of the day)?' I'm relieved if they don't go (to school). I would get them up, and tell them to finish, wait, etc, and I would comb their hair. So I'm happy, and the school, teachers, and everyone else got a break for three terms."

Mother, a big city

School systems play an important role in ensuring the consistent attendance of students and their parents throughout all days of the week and at all educational levels:

"My older children are in school. If they are absent without an excuse, they will lose a mark, and if they are absent for 3 times, their parent will be summoned."

Mother, a big city

"My daughter does not attend school on Thursdays, and her school gives students a certificate stating that she attended on Thursdays. Elementary schools motivate them; whoever doesn't miss a day gets a gift every Thursday."

Mother, a big city

A table showing the percentage of students enrolled in education who were voluntarily absent from school during the past 12 months, broken down by gender and age group:

Source: GASTAT - Education and Training Survey 2024

During the past 12 months	(8–14 years old)			(15-19 years old)		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
I've never been absent.	35.73	37.58	36.65	39.18	41.05	40.35
1-3 times	36.95	36.8	36.88	32.87	34.78	33.82
4-9 times	22.2	21.32	21.77	21.11	20.01	20.57
10-30 times	4.95	4.13	4.55	6.31	3.55	4.94
+30 times	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.53	0.12	0.33

In a survey conducted by KKF in 2024 [32] to determine the percentage of families whose children are absent from school for more than 10% of school days (equivalent to 18 school days), the findings showed that 8% of Saudi students are frequently absent from school. It is an international indicator that specialists follow to learn about the educational experience of children and the extent to which they fully benefit from education in developing skills and improving scientific and professional development in the future.

A benchmark of this indicator's position against peer countries:
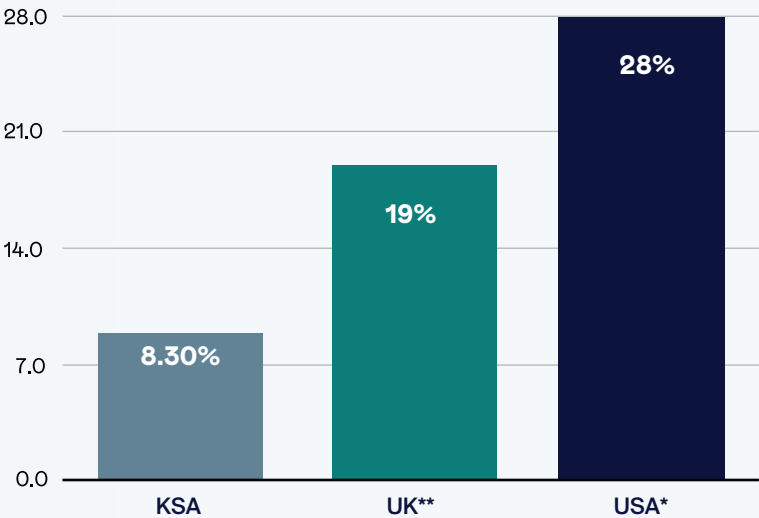
The methodology varies between countries, with the UK and USA relying on school records, while in Saudi Arabia, the percentage was calculated based on a household survey.

Apathy and social isolation behaviors

It may be natural to understand these behaviors after reviewing the phenomena of staying up late, malnutrition, and school absenteeism, resulting in poor health and lack of activity on the one hand, and a lack of discipline and commitment on the other, which would lead to this type of behavior. However, it is difficult to determine the causes of this phenomenon, as the sample of children expressed different and varied opinions that are important to pay attention to in order to fully understand the experience.

It was noticeable in the field research sample that phrases such as "I don't have friends" or "I'm alone" were frequently used, reflecting social isolation and weakness in social communication. Other phrases, such as "We have nowhere to go," were frequently heard, especially in medium and small-sized cities. Some children expressed a lack of interest and a stagnant life, describing themselves as "I don't know what I like" or "I'm always tired". These behaviors are more prevalent among adolescents and have their own specific characteristics,which will be discussed further in the final experience. **(X: Transition to Adulthood)**.

32. A survey developed by the KKF and conducted by the Saudi Center for Opinion Polling (SCOP) in 2024 for a random sample representative of the Saudi population of 1505.

*. U.S. Department of Education (2023), Chronic Absenteeism

**. UK Department for Education (2024), Pupil absence in schools in England

V

Exposure to Harm

!

Children are exposed to varying levels of harm all over the world. These are experiences that are difficult to prevent, but it is important to reduce, raise awareness about, and understand them in order to find appropriate solutions. Depending on life circumstances, a child may experience difficult and unpredictable situations. But these situations have a decisive impact on the child's future life, health, and long-term economic and social stability. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) [33,] such as family breakdown due to divorce, death, imprisonment, domestic violence, addiction, mental illness, exposure to harassment, physical abuse, or psychological neglect, can shape a child's future in adulthood. Exposure to one of these experiences is common in countries around the world (60% of adults) and in the Kingdom (80% of adults). However, their accumulation - and even exposure to one of them - - may lead the child to negative consequences throughout life, such as an increased rate of risky behaviors (e.g. early substance abuse or smoking), an increased likelihood of developing mental health problems (e.g. depression and anxiety), an increased risk of chronic diseases (e.g. obesity, cancer and heart disease), and social risks (e.g. self-harm or committing domestic violence later in their lives). [35,34]

This section will discuss the following negative experiences:

1 Bullying

2 Abuse and Neglect

3 Harassment

Bullying

Experiences of bullying emerged massively among the testimonies of children, parents, and teachers in qualitative field research, along with its negative repercussions on the children's behavior and psyche, and how children deal with it. Some children described the bullying as mischief or joking, not bullying. Bullying is not limited to peers; some have mentioned bullying at home or in the digital world as well.

"We have a poor girl who is sick and other girls are laughing at her. They say to her: 'Go away, we don't like you.' When they do that to me, I cry and go to the counselor."

Girl, 10 years old, a medium governorate

33. This abbreviation stands for **Adverse childhood experiences.**

34. Adverse childhood experiences and association with health, mental health, and risky behavior in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. 2016.

35. Adverse childhood experiences: a meta analysis of prevalence and moderators among half a million adults in 206 studies. 2023.

The General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT), in its latest survey on education and training, showed that 80% of children were not subjected to bullying, while 20% faced some form of bullying at a different rate.

A table showing the percentage of students enrolled in education who experienced bullying during the past 12 months, broken down by gender and age group[36]:

During the past 12 months	(8–14 years old)			(15-19 years old)		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
I wasn't exposed to bullying	81.05	82.57	81.80	86.83	85.46	86.15
Rarely	14.63	12.90	13.78	11.30	11.87	11.59
Several times a week	1.54	1.40	1.47	0.56	0.85	0.70
Several times a month	1.05	0.86	0.96	0.43	0.51	0.47
Several times a year	1.73	2.27	1.99	0.87	1.31	1.09

Source: GASTAT - Education and Training Survey 2024

In a recent survey conducted by KKF, the results showed that when parents were asked whether their school-aged children had disclosed to them that they had been subjected to physical or psychological violence, such as bullying, **23%** of them reported that one of their children had disclosed being bullied. **52%** of parents also expressed their fear that their children would be bullied and harmed when they go to school. While **10%** of parents reported that this type of harassment is very common. [37]

The sample agreed that this phenomenon was widespread, even if they or their children had not been exposed to it:

"I see girls coming to complain about each other, saying they bully me. Yes, this is very clear in the middle education stage. They comment on students' looks or hair. Students really care about appearances, so if something is minor, they'll insist on it. And there is something else that I don't like and always tell them: 'No, it's wrong. When they see a smart, excellent girl, may Allah bless her, they start making fun of her because she is smart and a studious girl. It's not good to harm her psychologically. She stops engaging so that no one makes fun of her. Some of the students were silenced, their light extinguished, just so no one would comment on them. The student's mother was mistaken when she told her daughter, 'That's it, don't engage anymore. ' The student's academic performance has declined. When her mother went to the supervisor at school, the supervisor asked her why she had told her daughter that. She told the mother that her daughter's teachers had complained about her performance, and that her grades had dropped. She asked the mother if there were any problems at home or if her daughter's health was alright. The mother said no, but students were making fun of her and bullying her, so I told her not to engage.

Mother, a medium governorate

Practitioners and parents discussed the impact of bullying on a child's self-confidence and sense of belonging to their environment, and how a child can become a bully themselves due to the bullying they have previously experienced.

"
"Yes, I've encountered the issue of bullying many times. Currently, even in older grades, like 5th or 6th grade, they're considered more aware than in preschool, for example. In preschool, they can't protect themselves, and they might not have the awareness of these things. Children still sometimes have problems, for example, with self-confidence and bullying from within the home. For example, I currently have a child who says that even my mom feels that I am not pretty. She always says to me: 'You are ugly (unclear words).' So, yes, we face this issue, and you must first be a listener. You must listen when a bullied student wants to talk, when they want to say that they had this experience, and so on. They want to express themself from their point of view. Then you can gradually teach them how to defend themselves, the correct way to do that, how to express feelings in the right way, and all these things."

Female social worker, a big city

Parents were confused about the best ways to support their children who were experiencing bullying. Some of the parents guided their children properly to enhance their self-confidence and communication with the school, and others advised their children to confront bullying with violence and fighting, which doubled the impact of the negative experience that the child was going through:

"
"My son is in middle school and was suffering from bullying. He told me: 'I can't, I don't know, honestly, boys are different from girls.' His brother told him, 'If someone bullies you, I'll step on them so that he doesn't do it again, because if you give a bully a chance, he'll keep bullying you.' My son said that he couldn't, because they are a group. I wasn't able to imagine the vulgar language those students used. My son, I swear, doesn't know what it means. I swear, even some of the words, I don't know what they mean. May Allah improve the situation."

Mother, a big city

مؤسسة الملك خالد
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Some children and practitioners expressed their opinions on the causes of the spread of bullying and its direct link to the family situation in which bullies live:

> "When you see the behaviors of the girl's family, you say: 'This problem is with the family,' because the girl doesn't have friends who say to her: 'Let's bully so-and-so, let's do this to so-and-so.' I knew that the problem was with the family, not with the students the girl is surrounded by. When she faces difficulties in the family, she reflects them on the girls in front of her. If she sees a quiet girl, she won't do anything. She starts causing troubles with what she sees."
>
> Female teenager, a medium governorate

> "It should be applied to mothers and parents before the child. The child acquires this from their environment. The child already comes to us with a bullying problem. I hope there is a punishment or something like that, like a place to solve this problem. Do you get the point?"
>
> Female teacher, a medium governorate

As for child bullies, some of them do not consider what they do to be bullying, but rather a form of joking and teasing:

> "Honestly, for example, I have short friends, so I like to call them short. I like to joke with them. Actually, I like short girls, so I can't bully a girl I like. That's it, only jokes within limits, for example."
>
> Girl, a big city

Abuse and Neglect

The importance of measuring indicators of exposure to abuse has increased with the adoption by the Kingdom and countries around the world of indicators to measure progress in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. SDG Target 5.2 states that: "Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation." Its indicator, No. 5.2.1, measures "the proportion of women and girls aged 15 and above who have experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence from a current or former intimate partner during the previous 12 months". Target 16.2 states: "End abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children". Its indicator, No. 16.2.1, measures "the proportion of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological abuse by their caregivers in the previous month". However, there is no published data from the Kingdom on these indicators so far, according to the GASTAT latest report on SDGs indicators for 2022.

The global situation regarding indicators for monitoring children's exposure to violence and danger worldwide.

Indicator	Year	Region	Rate
5.2.1: The proportion of women and girls aged 15 and above who have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence 1-3 times from a current or former intimate partner during the previous 12 months.	2018	Worldwide	10%
16.2.1: The proportion of children aged 1-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological abuse by their caregivers in the previous month.	2023	Worldwide	77.7%

Although updated data is unavailable, and accurate methodologies and surveys are not being implemented to identify such phenomena, several scientific studies have published several indicators in the Kingdom, which we will review below:

Indicators of Child Abuse in Saudi Arabia [38]

65%	**64%**	**53%**	**50%**	**10%**
Psychological Abuse	Witnessing Violence	Neglect	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse
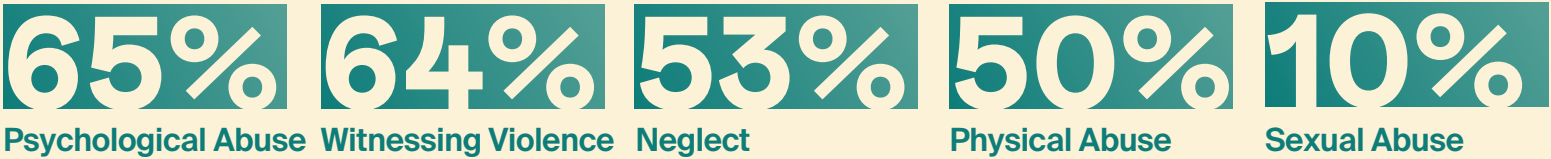
38. Multiple sources: Maha Almuneef, Hassan Saleheen, Fatimah Al Shehri and Majid Al-Eissa (2019): Understanding the needs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Child maltreatment prevention program development.

38. Saudi Medical Journal, "Child neglect in Saudi Arabia" (2022), Maha AlFarhan, Jana AlMelhem, Abeer ElMahadi, Haneen AlTurki, Saleheen Hassan, and Maha Almuneef

11%

of Saudi parents don't visit any public parks with their children.*

Next Generation of Saudis
Childhood in Saudi Arabia

مؤسسة الملك خالد
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Regarding children's access to child protection services, KKF discussed in an independent study the procedures for accessing protection services and domestic violence. The Kingdom has allocated a hotline to receive reports of domestic violence via the unified number 1919, which receives calls from children or if they are subjected to violence. In addition to the Child Helpline 11611, provided by the Family Safety Program at the Ministry of National Guard since its establishment in 2016. The National Center for Security Operations (NCSO) (911) and the "We Are All Security" application also work to receive reports of domestic violence around the clock. According to data published by the Human Rights Commission in the National Report for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2024, the number of reports of domestic violence in 2022 reached 29,991 reports, 70% of which were related to females and 30% to males. In terms of age, reports from children (18 years and below) constituted 36%, from adults (19-60 years) 61%, and from the elderly (60 years and above) 3% of reports.*

The results of the field research showed a clear diversity of experiences within the family, such as the practice of hitting as a method of punishment by parents, and most notably, manifestations of parental neglect of their children:

◤ Absence of the Father's Role

Children and mothers spoke about the problem of the father's absence from the child's life and his absence from the tasks of care and upbringing. Fathers focus on the traditional roles of earning a living and meeting the family's financial needs, but in the relationship with the children, their role is sometimes described as "absent" or limited to the "entertainment role".

> "[I wish my father would] pay more attention. I mean, I wish there was someone I'd be afraid of when getting a low grade, someone waiting for me to encourage me to get a higher grade."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium governorate

> "Sometimes you feel your father ignores you. He would say that he is really busy and keep traveling somewhere."
>
> Male teenager, 16 years old, a medium governorate

> "My dad is always tired. I don't talk to him much."
>
> Female teenager, 16 years old, a medium city

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*.   **Universal Periodic Review – Saudi Arabia (2024). United Nations Human Rights Council**

▶

The dissatisfaction was compounded for a large group of mothers due to the weak presence of the father in their children's lives:

> "My daughter says: 'Why doesn't daddy pick me up from school?' She sees the fathers of her classmates do. My daughter wishes her father would support her and be there for her. When she asks him for anything, he always tells her to go and ask me."
>
> Mother, a big city

> "The father is rarely present; transportation is the responsibility of the driver, my eldest son, or Uber. Their father depends on me totally."
>
> Mother, a big city

The mothers shared another point of contention regarding the father's role being limited to entertainment and the lack of his involvement in raising the children, which appeals to a large group of children:

> "I entrust my affairs to Allah. The father is just a name. He's relaxed, and if you talk to him about anything, he doesn't respond. If he is at home, he would say to my children (don't worry about your mother, go)."
>
> A mother from a medium city

> "My father is the closest person to me. He doesn't say "no" and agrees to everything, unlike my mom. Sometimes she is convinced quickly about some things, sometimes she might say: 'No, later,' but she rarely says: No, impossible."
>
> Female teenager, 15 years old, a medium city

> "I love Dad because he never says 'no' and Mom also, but I love Dad more."
>
> Female teenager, 14 years old, a medium city

> "I feel that my father is the kindest person in life. His role is purely recreational."
>
> A mother from a medium city

As for the fathers, a small group of them shared their sense of guilt for their absence from the educational role:

> "I just retired, and the picture became clearer, but what's most obvious to me is that I was neglecting many things for my home, family, and children."
>
> Father, a medium city

> "I wish I could spend more time with them, especially with my child, because sometimes with the hustle and bustle, I get a little busy outside the house. I won't meet him until the morning if I take him to school. I won't see him there all day. I'll arrive home and he'll be asleep. This is what bothers me the most, the issue of sometimes not seeing or siting with my child."
>
> Father, a medium city

▼ Child Witnessing Violence Inside the Home

Some mothers who have experienced domestic violence spoke about their children witnessing their mother being hit by her husband, and sometimes the children intervene to protect the mother and try to stop the violence.

The researchers discussed addiction issues and their impact on the family and the child, which forces survivors to escape the effects of addiction and the cycle of violence through divorce:

> "My father was an addict... He used to hit my mother in front of me and insult her. I slept in a warehouse, and my stepmother would turn off the air conditioner, walk on my abdomen, and step on me."
>
> Girl, 12 years old, a medium governorate

> "A week from hell! The horror we experienced was as if we were in Guantanamo! While I was sleeping with my daughters, he entered the room and tried to strangle me. That's how I felt. My daughter was studying from home at that time. When he saw my daughter, he got scared and left. He was bullying me alone; he used all his power against me. He sought any chance to be with me alone. I felt my daughter was aware of what was going on. I was walking and found my daughter behind me. I said to her: 'Why are you walking behind me? Go.' She said to me: 'No, I want to be with you.' My eldest daughter was exhausted. I was trying to show my daughters that the situation was normal and they did not have to worry, and that their father was fine and he's just temperamental. They felt that something was not normal every time something happened. The last thing I did was talk to his brother and said, 'Come on, I can't take it anymore. The day his brother came, he couldn't take us away. My husband said: 'They won't leave the house.' His brother tricked him with words, saying: 'I'll bring them to you in a week.' His brother took us out of the house and said: 'He is overdosed, lost!'. Honestly, we experienced horror till we left the house. I can't describe it."
>
> Mother who survived violence from an addict in a medium governorate

But not every child who lives in a family suffering from addiction necessarily chooses to separate. Addiction continues to impose its negative effects on family life until the family is saved by separation or the addict recovers and the family is stabilized. Sometimes, even with separation, the child's problems persist if their custody remains with the addict. Separation does not mean the survival of all family members, as the parents may remarry and form new families, leaving the child vulnerable to neglect.

Harassment

!

> ***Note to readers:** This section will deal with harsh and hurtful accounts of children being subjected to harassment.

Some children, parents, and specialists have revealed bad experiences that children go through, including exposure to blatant violations such as rape, sexual harassment, enticement, blackmail, kidnapping, exploitation, and violence of all kinds (verbal, physical, and psychological).

Some male children spoke about the prevalence of harassment among students at school and its acceptance as a form of joking among students:

> "[Harassment and touching] are common. But only between friends. He's your friend, and that's it. (Explanation of how a child might harass another through touching). [If he's not your friend] there will be a fight."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, a big city

> "It is my first term in the first year of middle school. As you say, there is student harassment, smoking, and drifting. Some students did something bad. They said to me: 'Come on, join us,' and I was surprised. I was at school and I had just entered when one of the students, who was weak and bullied by other students. They were doing something to him. They said: 'Come on, join us.' I said: 'No, I won't join you.' At first, I didn't know what they did until I saw them doing it with that student; I was surprised. They raped him, yes. They said: 'Come here.' I ran away to the principal. Thanks to Allah, I avoided this situation. I went to the principal, who was very cooperative, and he and the student counselor didn't fall short with me. The students avoided me for a while, of course."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium governorate

As for the toilets in schools, the majority of the sample mentioned them as one of the most dangerous places for the spread of bad behaviors, as described by children and parents, where abusive writings, bullying, harassment attempts, and grooming are widespread:

> "From the day I became aware of what students may do at school toilets, I don't even go into them. They are full of problems. I don't like them, and personally, I only feel comfortable in the house where I live. Even when I go to gatherings or events, I finish and go home."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium governorate

> "Wrong things can be done at school. There was a girl named (girl's name), and she was planning to do dirty things. She said to me: 'Come into the toilet with me,' and things like that, but I told the principal, and then I told my mother."
>
> Female teenager, 13 years old, a medium city

"
"There is a lot of immodesty in the school's toilets, and there are students who are smoking and using shisha at school. Many were caught in the toilets and dismissed for smoking shisha. A student was smoking shisha, and another student smelled the smoke and told the principal who called his father to come, and he got expelled. [After that] there is dirty talk, and students are uttering it as a sign of manhood. It's very widespread, especially among these young kids who are starting to learn these things and this lack of modesty."

Male teenager, 16 years old, a medium governorate

"
"I am worried and afraid of harassment, especially in schools. I mean, the school's toilets have many problems. I always advise my son (don't go into the toilet). I even advise my daughters. My daughter has reached a point where she doesn't go to the toilet at school, but as soon as she gets home, she and her sisters go to the bathroom. They are afraid to tell me: 'Mom, there are tomboy girls in our class whose behavior is scary.' But I'm aware and I opened them up. Even if you ask my son, he'll tell my mother told us not to take that nor go near that, and if someone touched him, he'd scream like that. I advise my young son. They lure children by saying things like: 'Here's some candy, I'll buy you some from the supermarket.' The word 'supermarket' is one of the worst words."

A mother from a medium city

One of the children explains that exposure to harassment leads the teenage victims themselves to harass younger children. One mother points out that children who witness harassment wish to experience it themselves.

"
"I had an incident during my elementary school days where someone followed me in a car. Someone came twice and stood at the door of my house and said to me (come), then I told my uncle and he disappeared. I know someone at school who accepts and goes with them. The problem is that the man is big and fat, and he is satisfied with himself. I kept myself away from him immediately. I went and talked to him, and he said: 'It's normal, it's not shameful or forbidden.' I immediately turned my back on him and left. They focus on high school or university students of an average height. Some middle school students are targeting elementary students who are small or short and do not understand. They want to repeat it or do what was done to them. They have a problem in their heads. We have a lot of them."

A mother from a medium city

The issue of children being lured through the Internet and the spread of inappropriate content was discussed at length by a sample of children, teenagers and parents:

"

"I don't give my Snapchat account to anyone. But I used to be almost reckless. I gave him my Snapchat and he started to lure me into talking. He was approximately 18 or 19 years old, and I was only 9 or 10 years old. My mind wasn't the same as it is now, and I consider myself very close to my mother. I informed her, and she said this was wrong and so on. I really felt upset when I messaged that person, and that I didn't want to continue. I spoke to my mother and she gave me the solution, thanks to Allah, and everything is fine. He used a nice style and said things like: 'You're handsome. Where are you from? Do you have sisters.' I felt this was wrong even though no one told me. He didn't start with pornographic clips, and gradually continued to send clips regularly, little by little. He eventually sent **pornographic content**.

Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

"

"Of course, I was related to the person I am telling about a long time ago, and now it's over. He said to me (How are you?) We were introduced to each other and this type of talk, such as (Let's play PlayStation and give me your Snapchat). After a while, I'd talk to him, and then he said: (What do you think about meeting at a restaurant? It's my treat if you want, and if you don't want to, it's okay). Of course, and he's two or three years older than me. The guy extended his hand (explanation of the method of harassment) and I said: (this is not accepted) and he replied: (it is okay I' joking) and so on. I was serious and firm about the matter. (No, brother, I don't like this kind of joke, it's wrong). Then, I went back home and he said: (Did you get upset with me or something?) and I said: (No, man) and things like that, but I really felt hurt. Yes, and this is my story with that person. Now I have cut off my relationship with him. When I see him, I say: 'Peace be upon you' and he says: 'Peace be upon you' and I walk away. My relationship with him is just normal. They call **such a person "Bazranji"**.

Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

"

"There are people who ask for **indecent pictures**, so all I do is block, ban, and mute them, that's all I can do."

Female teenager, 14 years old, a medium city

"

"I met one of them before. I had an experience with him to the point that I hated sweet talk, and he would give me words that were, you might say, emotional and nice. His speech changed after that. I got to know him through play. We were playing, and he lured me in, and I was too young to understand. I was 9 or 10 years old and I was playing. My family was watching over me and my older brother used to play with me. Even my older brother knew him and he was a good man, to be honest. He started talking sweetly to me through Snapchat, and then I hated him after that. **He wanted to lure me, and I didn't know, and he wanted to take me in the car**. He said he would take me in the car and pick me up and we would go for a drive. The intention was clear, and my mother opened the phone, saw it, and informed me of that mistake. Games are widespread if the player has a nice voice, is young, or is a girl, and such harassing persons will either give you money, a store, or anything else. I witnessed someone who was given something by that person before me when I was little. He transferred credit to me and said: 'Meet me,' and I blocked him because I understood from the previous time."

Male teenager, 14 years old, a medium city

"

"Mother: [My daughter] was in the second year of middle school, very young. A guy tried to know her and didn't just bother her; he annoyed her and made her hate herself. He put his mother's number and said, 'This is my account and this is my username, and I don't have any girls.' He was harassing her and wanted to get to know her by any means. She was terrified, especially since he gave her his mother's number. She was nervous and came to me and said, 'Mama, he gave me his mother's phone number.' She gave me the phone and I said: 'Where is his mother's number?' She gave it to me and I dialed it. You will get the shock later. 'Hello, peace be upon you, am I speaking to the mother of ....,' and I told her what her son did and that he was talking to my daughter. She replied: 'Please, may Allah bless you.' I said: 'Look, I can report him and I have all the messages he sent, I can send him to the ends of the earth.' She said, 'Please, may Allah bless you,' and she started complaining that he had a history of harassing girls. The shock isn't here, how old is he? **38 years old!** Then my daughter came in and hugged me tightly, saying: 'Thanks to Allah that you're my mom and not someone else.' I hugged her. I was so happy with that, I felt like I gave her the confidence to tell me about anything that happens to her. The next day, I went to her and we talked about the matter, and that TikTok was no longer available, and that she would carry the phone at the university, since she still didn't know right from wrong."

Mother of a girl, a big city

"My son had an incident where he came and told me that he had entered an account for dating. He gave me the number, and I followed Telegram, and he said, **'The account asked me to send pictures.'** I told him: 'Just ignore it, don't reply or anything. What scares you? Even if you did something wrong, he doesn't know who you are. And you made a mistake, and this is wrong.' He even deleted Telegram out of fear because he is still young, he is only in the third year of middle school. He doesn't know anything at all. I used to put the location on Snapchat. I saw where he goes, now he goes out with his cousins and stuff. I want to know, I mean, I see the map where he is."

A mother from a medium city

"Roblox is a popular game where you talk to people, add them, and chat with them using a microphone. I don't talk in chats much. Sometimes I add players and chat with them, then I find they've suddenly blocked me, and some of them are rude, so I'm just playing with myself. They are rude, for example, as seemed from their speech and clothes. They have a lot of **fights and engage in forbidden relationships in the game**, and things like that. A girl likes a boy, they add each other, things like that, even though she doesn't know him at all.

Female teenager, 13 years old, a medium governorate

The sample of mothers and practitioners spoke less about the prevalence of child harassment by relatives:

"I took a course with a doctor who taught us about the signs that we can observe in a child to understand that they have been subjected to harassment. When I saw this child, I called his mother and told her that the child had such signs and he was suffering from harassment. She told me that it was because of his uncle, and they managed to fix the situation."

Female teacher, a small village
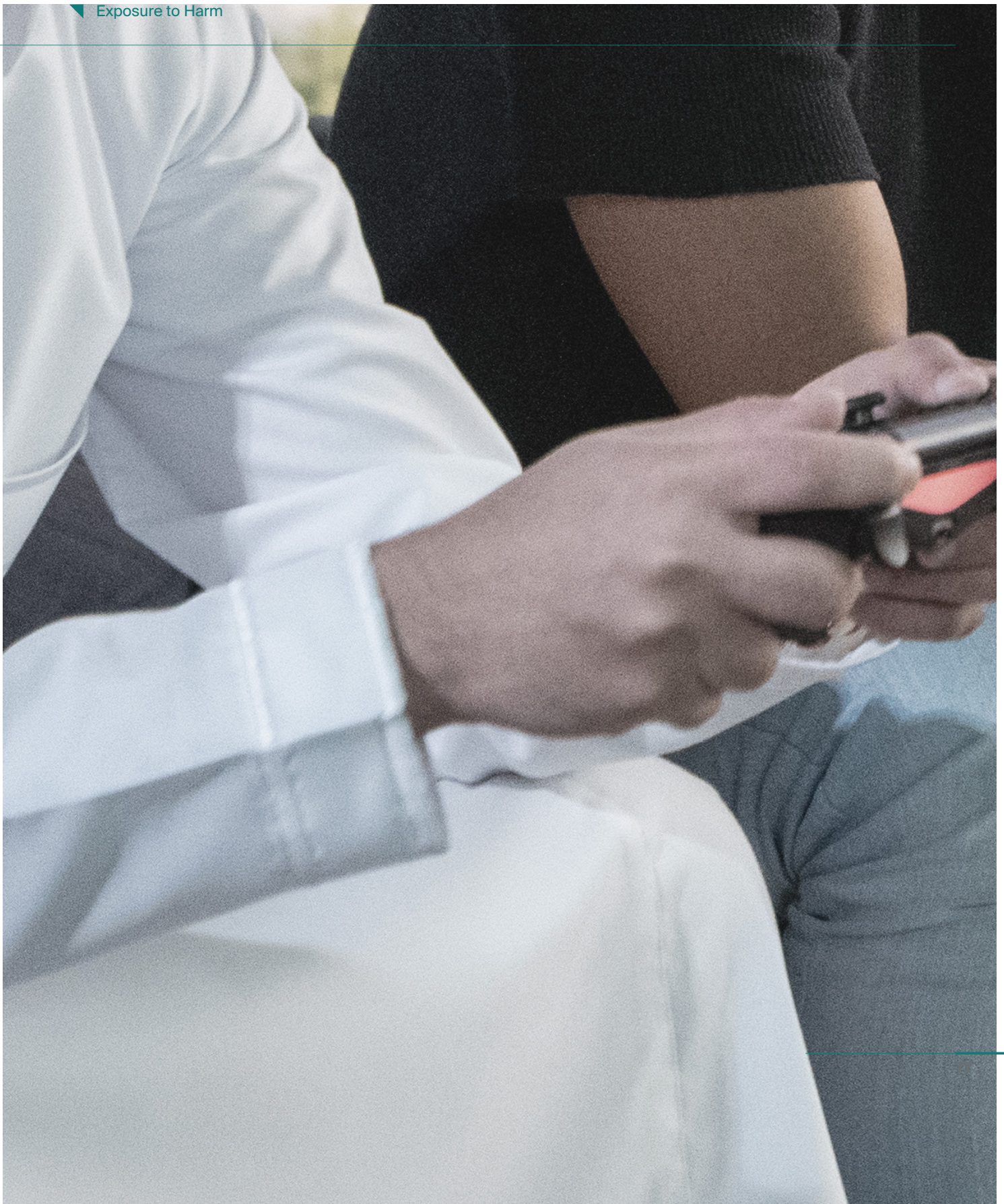
VI Loss

The experience of loss among children is present and clearly revealed by qualitative field data. This experience includes different aspects of a child's life, most notably the loss of a family member due to death, whether it be a parent, sibling, grandparent, or a relative such as an uncle or aunt. The experience of loss in society manifests itself differently among children of separated families. These children lose one parent according to the child custody decision, as well as losing the traditional form of a complete parental family. Further, some children lose one of their parents because of their imprisonment. The experience of children whose father is imprisoned is special, and because of it, these children suffer different challenges than the rest of the children. In addition to bad friendship experiences and the loss of friends, which constitute a form of loss for children. With this understanding of loss, it becomes clear how widespread this experience is among children in Saudi Arabia, and it is one of the normal life paths in any society.

Under this theme, we will discuss 3 patterns:

1 Loss of a parent

2 Parental separation

3 Children of prisoners

Loss of a parent

Official figures indicate that there are ~150,000 orphans in the Kingdom who benefit from orphanages [39]. The experience of loss and the death of a parent leaves difficult effects on the lives of orphaned children. The challenges faced by orphans in Saudi Arabia vary according to their circumstances. Before delving into these challenges, it should be noted that the data collected focused largely on families whose father had passed away, given that most associations specializing in orphans support this group. This is where the first challenge for families who lose their breadwinner because of death comes in: the sudden transfer of dependency to the mother, who is often not employed or does not have a stable income, making many of these families vulnerable to financial challenges and debt.

> "In general, the problems of orphans are not unknown, but they are not easy to solve. The first thing that comes to mind when you see an orphan is that he has a financial hardship, and this is what we see constantly. Most orphans, 90% of them, must have a financial problem. Their income is weak and not enough now, and they cannot manage life with this income."
>
> CEO of an association, a village

39. "Statistics on orphans in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia"
Specialized Council for Orphan Associations. 2024.

The mothers of orphans recount their psychological and financial difficulties after the death of the breadwinner, especially with the emergence of inheritance issues and problems:

"I am a widow with five orphans. Life is difficult, and I faced eight years of hardship with rent because I was managing the entire house, so I had no one but Allah. Thanks to Allah, the association helped us."

<div align="right">Mother of orphans, a city</div>

Mothers of orphans face the challenges of continuing to care for and look after their children, as well as the challenge of losing their husbands:

"I burst into tears, but I don't cry in front of my children. I feel suffocated; there's no one to complain to. If I complain, they tell me to be patient and endure this life. I don't feel like anyone is motivating or encouraging me with a single word. 'Be patient, tomorrow your children will grow up and make it up to you,' this is what I always hear from them. I've heard this so much over the past 8 years that I've started sitting and crying alone."

<div align="right">Mother of orphans, a city</div>

Practitioners point out that poor financial ability is reflected in the lives of orphans in a way that resembles neglect or shortcomings – in health, care, or personal hygiene – perhaps unintentionally, but due to the decline in financial status. These are more related to poverty than to orphanhood.

"There is negligence, even if there are shortcomings. There is negligence in cleanliness and the basics of life. For example, in teeth, and even in feeding. "

<div align="right">CEO of an association, a small town</div>

The workers pointed out that orphans are more vulnerable to exploitation than others, especially from their relatives, due to their limited ability to defend themselves and protect their interests.

"A while ago, we discovered that there was a brother who was taking the orphan subsidy of his sisters. He lives in another city, and we watched him. He came here. I spoke to (name) and we called the police for him."

<div align="right">CEO of an association, a village</div>

Specialists believe that the experience of loss constitutes a violent shock and disruption to the lives of orphans, both psychologically and academically. After loss, some orphans gather their strength to return and continue their journey with ambition and hope, but the void left by the loss of the father remains and is reflected in their behavior, according to specialists' observations. Some describe the impact of the shock on the orphan's life, leading to serious consequences, such as the child running away from home or suffering from psychological symptoms.

"My children are affected by the shock of losing their father. They fear and suffer from involuntary urination (urinary incontinence). I always struggle to deal with this issue."

Mother of orphans, a small city

"The children were greatly affected. The eldest son is still suffering a lot. He always writes poems for his father. His conscience is always bothering him. I took him to some people who recited Quran over him, and I told him that this matter was destined by Allah."

Mother of orphans, a small city

Some orphaned children shared their experience of being out of school for a period of time after their father's death:

"I am 14 years old and in the first year of middle school. My father died and I haven't gone to school."

Orphan boy, 14 years old, a small city

"I stopped studying for a year because of the death of my father, may Allah have mercy on him. On the day he died, I was in the first year of high school, approximately. I had to be a year late because he was in another city receiving treatment. I traveled with him. The treatment was delayed, and I was absent for a whole semester, so I decided to cancel my enrollment. My mental state was bad. I didn't care even if they told me to go back to studying; I might not go back to studying. I was not ready. Because I made my decision to stop for a year. I told my family that I'm going to suspend my studies for a year and then go back to studying because I'm not mentally ready to study. Thanks to Allah, I continued my education thereafter."

Orphan boy, 18 years old, a small city

A group of children expressed their feelings of loss and its impact on them in different ways, but all of these ways showed the magnitude of the event on their souls and a desire to find ways to overcome and move on:

"At night I am alone, no one is awake. It needs a somewhat strong person, and I am not a very strong person. But Allah willing, I'm going to strengthen myself. What he needs is someone who can help him move past that feeling whenever he hears the word 'Dad.' Loss is not something you can easily overcome, and it takes a person a very long time to return to their normal state;. I see that most of the people who lost loved ones haven't moved on."

Orphan girl, 17 years old, a small city

> "During elementary school, I got angry once, during the days after my father passed away. If someone made a mistake, I would get really angry. Maybe a year after he died. One time, someone made a mistake, and the counselor came and calmed us down and let us go."
>
> Orphan boy in a small city

> "Some young people would leave their homes and not return for a week or two. I met one, and some of them don't listen. There is no appreciation because there is no guidance at home. Some of them were among the best students, and suddenly their lives changed." "
>
> Practitioner in a small city

Mothers of orphans shared their different experiences in dealing with their children and their feelings of loss. The experience of one mother was dominated by double sadness in many situations; she is unable to control her feelings and enters into a shared bout of grief with her children:

> "Yesterday, my daughter was sitting and crying, and I was next to her, and I was crying because of what was on her mind. I would tell her: 'Don't cry, I miss your father too'. I talk to her, and she talks to me and we cry. I said: 'You shouldn't cry, should you?' for your father?'. She said: 'It hurts me.' I told her that other people lost their fathers and didn't see them. The Prophet (PBUH) died and he didn't have a father and never saw him. But she saw her father and looked at him. 'Should this make you cry? Did we fall short with you in any way?' She said 'No.' I told her that my hair turned gray and I had never been married. So she would know that I kept quiet and didn't listen to others' talk, and that this should support her."
>
> Mother of orphans, a small city

Opinions varied among mothers and practitioners in the sample regarding the best ways to deal with the shock of loss, ranging from trying to fill the void left by the absence of the father and mentor to encouraging children to let go and move on:

> "An orphan who has lost his father is missing part of him, and we try as much as possible to compensate it. Orphans show signs of nervousness; the loss of a father has a psychological impact. The absence of the father is a big deal for them, and they never see anyone like their father. "
>
> Practitioner in a small city

"

"There is an important topic, which is the topic of trauma. Post-accident trauma. This is something you need to deal with by being a protective father figure to him in any action. One of the mothers says: 'My son. Since his father passed away, to this day, if anyone upsets him, he cries, holds his breath, and runs away. He goes out. We can't control him.' I have noticed the issue, and this is a real phenomenon. And sometimes in football, in football competitions, you can't control this boy. We sat with him and talked to him and his mother about the best way and so on, and she said that the problem was that since he was young, he had been this way. He must reach a certain stage and start to realize that life is the same for everyone. If he stays like that, he won't go on in his life. He won't continue, succeed, or progress. [After that] something happened. He got upset and didn't go out. I was surprised because he usually gets upset and goes out and walks, but that day he didn't do that, and he controlled himself and sat in the playground. When I sat with him later and asked him, and he said he wanted to overcome that habit." "

Practitioner in a small city

The practitioners in the orphanages in the sample repeatedly spoke about the poor student guidance in some schools in dealing with orphaned children:

"

"Some of the school counselors don't communicate well. During the last week, an orphan had a problem with one of the teachers who hit him because he did not complete his work. We contacted the teacher, and when he found out that he was an orphan, he began to apologize and talk to the child. But he treated him the same way again. The boy came here and spoke to me. His mother told me and contacted the student counselor, and he is a kind and honest man. I was talking to him and he said: 'Look, the fingers of your hand are not the same, so are counselors. They have different personalities.' Honestly, if we had found counselors who dealt with students, we would not have found any case like this happening, especially with orphans. "

Practitioner in a small city

Parental separation

Childcare practitioners in the field research sample noted an increase in divorce rates in society, and the latest census data shows that 3.6% of Saudi adults are divorced, equivalent to 445,000 divorced Saudi men and women. [40]It should be noted that parental separation is not always necessarily through formal divorce. There are other forms of separation, even between married couples. Divorce does not necessarily mean that there are children between the divorced couple, because there are cases of divorce that occur before any children are born.

> "
>
> "Many cases result in 30% separation per class."
>
> Male teacher, a medium governorate

Children, specialists, and parents recount difficult experiences resulting from parental separation and divorce. The child is usually the victim, caught between problems of neglect and shortcomings, and issues of abuse due to spite or stubbornness between the separated parents. Thus, the child becomes a battleground for settling scores and revenge between the divorced couple, which one teacher described as "war". The divorced couple exchange accusations through the child as a conduit for news, accusations, and insults, and he becomes a victim in the incitement against the other party. In many cases, the situation reaches the point of neglecting the child to spite the other party, especially in terms of appearance, personal hygiene, nutrition, and protection from abuse, according to specialists.

As with families of orphans, the challenge of living conditions once again emerges as a challenge that the children face directly and feel clearly:

> "
>
> "There are family arguments between my mother and father; my father gets upset with my mother. He doesn't love my mother. My mother is divorced. My father is not nice to us, he doesn't care about the house or anything else. He comes to the door and walks away just to see my little sister. He asks me how I am and what's new, and then he leaves. But my mother is the one providing for us."
>
> Girl, 12 years old, a medium governorate

> "
>
> "The financial situation is not very good, and also, my father doesn't spend money on us anymore. My mother does. We have spoken to my father more than once, telling him about the money, and he says, 'I am not responsible for you, I'll marry.' He hasn't married yet, but he is using marriage as an excuse, meaning he wants to get married because of the expenses. He's getting married to upset us, in short."
>
> Teenager, 14 years old, a medium governorate

The child becomes a victim of separation, the signs of which appear in neglecting the children, keeping them out of school, not providing them with proper nutrition, or neglecting their personal hygiene:

> "
>
> "Some parents might stop their children's education. For example, if there is a dispute between a husband and wife, the husband would stop their children's education. He deprives them of their mother so that she doesn't go to school, check on them, or see them."
>
> Female family protection specialist in a medium governorate

40. "Marital status of the population, based on data from the Kingdom's 2022 census"GASTAT

> ▶

> "[Some divorced couples] try as much as possible to keep busy with things after the divorce phase is over. There's nothing the father can do to get to the mother to take revenge on her, and vice versa. It seems that women are more often the ones we encounter in terms of revenge, and they often use the children as a means to settle scores and take revenge on the father through the children, whether through the outward appearance or through education, or using children as a method and way of trying to convey words from the mother to the father. The opposite is also true, and the father often uses children as a conduit for news."
>
> Male specialist, a medium city

> "Some parents don't care; some parents are forced by their circumstances. There might be family problems between them. For example, the mother and the father might be married after the separation, so the child is lost, and the school becomes the responsibility of both of them. So, there is not enough attention to personal hygiene, clothes, food, and care."
>
> Male specialist, a big city

For another group of parents, divorce becomes a justification for competitive behaviors between parents in caring for their children in a negative way that affects their behavior:

> "It actually affects behavior to the point where there is competition between the father and mother. Sometimes the father tries to spoil his son, especially if the son spends two or three days with his father, so the spoiling and pampering increase. This affects behavior at school, and the child becomes more aggressive than his colleagues because of the excessive pampering. He wants everything for himself. Sometimes if the father is too strict with the son, the same situation occurs. One year, a student hit two other students, and it turned out the father was hitting him and there was a family separation."
>
> Male teacher, a medium city

Practitioners agreed that parental separation creates feelings of fear and insecurity in the child:

> "The harmony between the father and mother causes security for the child, but when there is a difference between them, the child sees tension and feels completely unstable, especially if there is a separation. For example, the son would feel lost, unable to go to his father or mother. If he went to the father, he would tell him to go to the mother, and if he went to the mother, she would tell him to go to the father. So, the child would not feel secure, going around in circles. I think this is the idea."
>
> Male specialist, a big city

There are cases where parental separation has had a positive impact on children, especially in cases of domestic violence and addiction, where the parents remaining together as spouses becomes more dangerous than their separation. Some families in the sample reported that their social situation had improved after separating from the abuser, although psychological scars remained as a result of the accumulation of violence.

"Unfortunately, I don't receive any alimony. I feel there's a bias towards men. And I told the judge: 'There should be no bias, I am separated from a drug addict.' He was imprisoned during a crackdown on drugs, but he denied the accusation. He said that there was a problem between him and another person. After he was released, his behavior was completely abnormal. To the extent that my daughter had to pull me away from him. So, I've finally realized that he had reached a certain stage. He extended his hand, and I expected (the divorce). I called the police, and they came, and I told them about the incident that happened, and they said (Shabu drug), so we broke up. Psychologically, the situation is new to us. I overthink things and forget other things I have to do, for example, I stayed up all night and didn't sleep till I came here today. I think about how we'll live. How I'll pay off my debts. Believe me or not, even my hair started falling out. Most people tell me not to think too much or I'll be exhausted. I can't, one has to think about making a living, the children, when they will come, and how they will sleep. Some of them don't sleep. They stay up till they go to school. They come back and sleep. They wake up at 3 or 4 in the morning. They stay awake and go to school in the morning. A divorced woman with children bears the responsibility of both the mother and father. When a man is on his own, he can manage. A man can take care of himself, get a job, manage on his own with anything. But when a woman is carrying all this responsibility on her own, it's really not easy. Before, I thought it was something easy, I mean, I took it easy. It's not easy, it's very difficult. One of my children, influenced by his father, would come and start yelling at me (What did you do to us?) (Why did you bring us here?) On top of enduring a financial situation, I am also enduring a psychological situation. And the drugged-up father is finished off the world and leaned on it. One worry after another. Honestly, everything is so expensive. You will spend money to buy what you need for a week, then the next week will come and you're forced to spend again."

Divorcee, a big city

Children of prisoners

This experience represents a small group of children in certain circumstances where one of the parents was absent from their children's life due to serving a prison sentence. We will review some experiences shared by the children who were interviewed by the research team to learn about their life journey.

The way children express their feelings about their father's absence from home is very similar to the orphans' experience of losing a parent:

> "My father is in prison and my mother is left on her own.
>
> Boy, 10 years old, a medium city

> "Research team: So what do you want to be when you grow up?
>
> Girl: Umm, I really don't know how to say this…
>
> (…)
>
> Girl: But I don't want to upset him, I wish for my father.
>
> Research team: Do you wish for your father?
>
> Girl: Yes.
>
> Research team: Where is your father?
>
> Girl: In prison."
>
> Girl, 13 years old, a medium city

Some of the children from these families visit their imprisoned fathers in prison during visiting hours, and the children innocently described this experience:

> "My father buys things for me from inside the prison and brings them to us; we can't buy anything from inside."
>
> Boy, 10 years old, a medium city

VII Disability

There are more than 150,000 Saudi children with disabilities. [41] Qualitative field research shows that disability is directly related to childhood for several reasons, including early diagnosis in childhood and early interventions in determining the child's future and life shape.

Qualitative field research shows that the experience of children with disabilities is strongly linked to missing the opportunity for early diagnosis. Some families had prior knowledge of the child's disability during pregnancy due to genetic diseases, while for the majority of families, the news of their child's disability was shocking and posed a psychological challenge for them in accepting the news and the child's new reality. The experience of the parents of a disabled child can be summarized in their attempt to find suitable opportunities for them in education and recreation, with growing fears about securing their child's future when they reach adulthood.

As for the types of disability prevalent among children, the latest official surveys show that vision and mobility disabilities are the most common among children. [42]

Relative distribution of individuals with a single disability in the 2-4 year age group, according to the disability type

Vision	Mobility (inability to walk)	Communication	Hearing
31.6%	29.0%	17.5%	10.2%
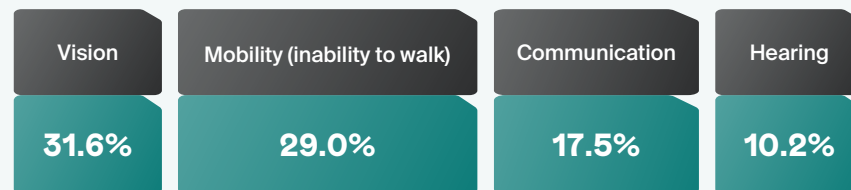
Relative distribution of individuals with a single disability in the 5-17 year age group, according to the disability type

Mobility (inability to walk)	Vision	Communication	Hearing
35.7%	30.8%	9.8%	7.6%
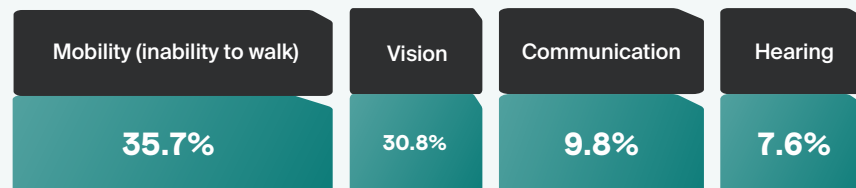
41. Saudi Census (2022) **"Health and Disability Statistics General Authority for Statistics."**

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42. **GASTAT (2023),** Disability Statistics Publication 2023

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مؤسسة الملك خالد
KING KHALID FOUNDATION

Regarding the causes of disability in Saudi Arabia, we find that the largest percentage is due to illness (39.2%), followed by congenital factors (26.9%). There is a low percentage of factors related to pregnancy (1.5%) and childbirth (8.8%).

Relative distribution of causes of disability among individuals with disabilities

Cause	Percentage
Due to a disease	39.2 %
Congenital factors	26.9 %
Old age	16.1 %
During childbirth	8.8 %
Traffic accidents	4.7 %
Other	1.8 %
During pregnancy	1.5 %
Medical errors	0.9 %
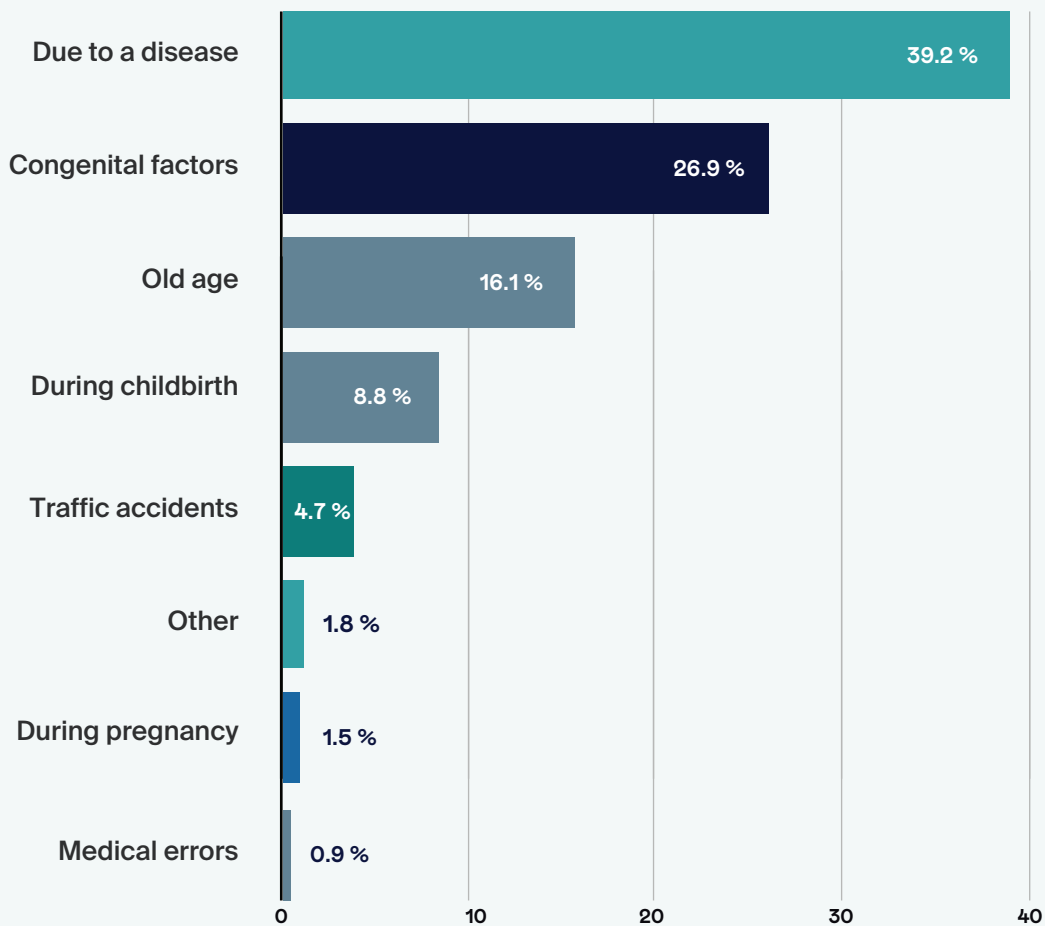
*The table includes data on mild difficulty and multiple disabilities.

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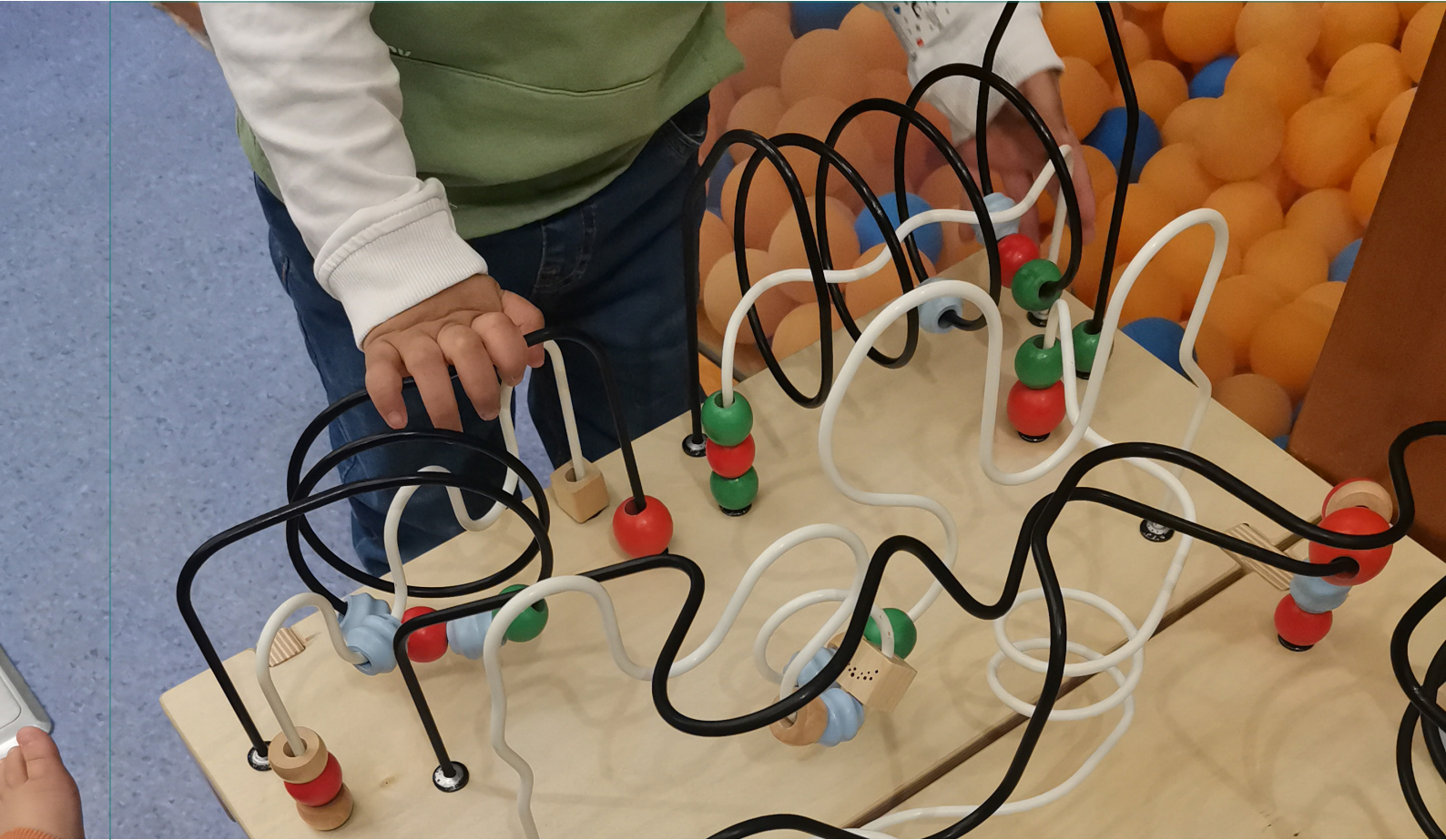
Research indicates that cerebral palsy is the leading cause of disability in Saudi Arabia. [43] It is one of the causes of disability that must be detected early in the first months so that its impact and exacerbation in people can be reduced. The risk of cerebral palsy increases [43]in children of consanguineous marriage. The latest research in 2025 [44]showed that children diagnosed with cerebral palsy in the Kingdom undergo their first rehabilitation therapy session at the age of 19 to 27 months, thus missing the opportunity for early intervention and treatment. Experts confirm that this disease can be detected early, before the end of the fifth month of a child's life.

The early years are the most important in a child's development, as more than a million neural connections are formed in their brains every second – a rapid rate of growth that never happens again in a person's life after early childhood. This makes investing in a child's health and nutrition during their first moments more impactful than ever, and crucial to their brain development. [45] In several countries, such as Singapore, growth screening visitsare scheduled in parallel with the basic childhood immunization schedule. The family makes seven visits during the first six years of the child's life, during which they receive several basic vaccinations, and their growth is monitored compared to expectations through screening to monitor the child's personal and social abilities, such as standing, walking, movement, and the ability to express. themselves and communicate. [46]

43. Jaya Tedla et al. **"Quality of Life among Children with Cerebral Palsy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Various Factors Influencing It: A Cross-sectional Study"** 2025

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45. **Early Childhood Development – UNICEF**

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44. Abdulrahman Almashabi et al. **"Waiting Time and Focus of Physical Therapy for Children with Cerebral Palsy in Saudi Arabia: Parents' Report"** 2025.

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46. **Ministry of Health of Singapore. Childhood developmental screening.**

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Looking at impact measurement studies of these programs, we find that early detection programs do not necessarily lead to achieving the desired impact. The key is "early intervention," which takes place as soon as the disability or difficulty is discovered. But early intervention itself will not be possible without early detection. Therefore, the success of integrating and developing children with disabilities depends on the success of access to early detection and immediate intervention after detection. [47]

Missing the opportunity for early diagnosis and intervention is a missed crucial window in a child's development, especially during the first five years of life. Studies have shown that intellectual and developmental disabilities and disorders – when diagnosed during the first years of a child's life – can be improved with early access to rehabilitation services, and result in good gains in the child's development. After 6 years of age for children with disabilities, it becomes difficult to seize the opportunity to rehabilitate them. However, there are still positive results in enhancing their functional skills, independence and quality of life. Research has concluded that early intervention during the first months of life for infants with brain injuries has a significant and positive impact on their motor and cognitive abilities. [48] The results were also positive when studying the impact of early intervention on children with autism, especially on their daily and motor skills. [49]

The results of the qualitative field research confirm what the quantitative research results have demonstrated regarding the missed opportunity for early intervention to address childhood disability in the Kingdom.

Some mothers reported that they were aware of their child's disability during pregnancy due to genetic reasons resulting from consanguineous marriage:

> "I was pregnant after 7 years (from marriage), and then I got pregnant with my second child. For 3 months, I had a problem; they said the placenta was low-lying or something like that. The most important thing is that the doctor saw me and said I had a low-lying placenta and that the baby had a problem. I asked him what the baby's problem was, and he said it's in the brain, with 1 cm of fluid. The day I came there to do the tests, my mother insisted that I repeat them. When I repeated them, I came to her and she said: 'Did you know what's wrong with the baby?' I said: 'Yes, I knew. The baby has fluid in her head, and medical staff say it will go away as the pregnancy progresses.' Some of the medical staff told me I was pregnant with a child like an animal, with a lemon's head and a tail behind it. This is what was said to me in the hospital, I swear."

Mother, a medium city

47. **Universal Screening of Young Children for Developmental Disorders:** Unpacking the Controversies Ina Wallace. National Library of Medicine

48. The effects of early rehabilitation in high-risk infants with brain injury: **a systematic review and meta-analysis.** 2021

49. The Efficacy of Early Interventions for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: **A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.** 2022.

Some parents believe that the pregnancy and childbirth stage had an impact on their children developing some form of disability, either due to a lack of awareness of the pregnant woman, nutrition low quality, inadequate access to good health care, or poor mental health. Or from the effects of premature birth or difficult births, which resulted in some complications and side effects.

"It was very difficult when I gave birth to my son. I think the birth may have caused this autism. The birth was normal, but it was very, very difficult."

<div align="right">Mother of a child with disabilities, a big city</div>

"What preparations? The woman who delivered me was in training and didn't handle the delivery quickly. She made me suffer, and the baby was crying, drinking water, and vomiting. I think the delivery caused it."

<div align="right">Mother of a child with disabilities, a big city</div>

"Of course, 80% of newborns have oxygen deficiency during birth. I don't know, these are all speculations."

<div align="right">Father of a child with a disability</div>

"We have a deficiency in raising awareness about prenatal disabilities before marriage. Mothers must be educated."

<div align="right">Father of a child with disabilities, a medium city</div>

"From the moment I gave birth to my daughter. They didn't tell me anything at the hospital, but they discharged her normally with me. They told me her condition is fine. Even in her file they wrote that she was (healthy). After 3 months, I felt her eyes moving, meaning they weren't fixed. I felt them going up and down. Then we started physical therapy. "She doesn't grow at a normal rate. Everything in her is delayed. Her eyesight is very poor, and we did scans because we were afraid she might not see. Thanks to Allah, everything is fine. I mean, her eye movement is still weak, but it's only slightly."

<div align="right">Mother of a child with Down syndrome, a medium city</div>

"My father buys things for me from inside the prison and brings them to us; we can't buy anything from inside."

<div align="right">Boy, 10 years old, a medium city</div>

> "Father: They didn't say anything at the time of birth. There is absolutely no diagnosis. It could be a mistake on the part of the hospital itself; if they had informed us earlier... They should inform you about this at the time of birth, what is going to happen. It should be clear from the time of birth. My child was very weak and fell. She had no balance, and she does not crawl properly. For a year-and-half child, we started to worry a little, you know. We started to focus on her brother, then we watched if he was taking the same steps. He reached 8 months old, and he was still the same, not moving, not going or coming anywhere. We started to suspect that there was something wrong with him, and that's what made us take action."

Father of two children with disabilities, a big city

Practitioners in the field of rehabilitation for people with disabilities expressed their deep dissatisfaction with the delay in diagnosing children and in starting early treatment:

> "I would work with a child for a month, two or three months, but there is no progress. Because when a child comes to a practitioner at a late age and in a very severe condition, the practitioner will not see any improvement of them. There may be a slight improvement. But when a child comes to me a little delayed, not too delayed, they will have the ability to learn or train quickly. This gives me hope."

Autism male specialist, a big city

> "Some cases came in late due to a lack of awareness or a delayed diagnosis."

Female psychologist, a medium governorate

> "Well, at first I was shocked, I broke down. Because his brother died before, drowning, and he had the same condition, he had autism, but we didn't know. He died at his uncles' house at the age of 5 or 6. I observe the movements of the second child which are exactly the same. If only I was aware of it. Perhaps this is something that was destined, praise and thanks be to Allah. It is possible that he won't die. I'm starting to remember. This was ignorance on my part, and on the part of society and health institutions. My son is 4 or 5 years old and I don't know that he has autism. I discovered that he has autism by chance. It was a shock and I had no idea! I'm a social researcher specializing in family and childhood, but we haven't addressed the issue of autism."

A father of two autistic children, one of whom drowned, a large city

The challenges of denial, rejection, and shame were prominent in the testimonies of families of people with disabilities, exacerbated by the practices of some doctors in conveying the news and information to parents:

> "Even when I went to a doctor, I would eagerly await his appointment and say to him: 'Okay, give me a way to help myself with my disabled child, how can I get through this, how can I make them better?' But no one was helping me, no one was there. He would say to me: 'It's a mental retardation. Just feed them, give them a drink, and put them to sleep.' Life is not eating, drinking, and sleeping!"
>
> Mother of children with disabilities, a medium city

Families experience a profound shock when they discover that one of their children has a disability, which is reflected in their willingness to seek rehabilitation services. Treatment depends on the family's acceptance of the condition and the response of their child's condition to rehabilitation. The shock may escalate into a family dispute between the spouses due to a lack of understanding about the priority of care and the future of the family with the child. One reports that the stigma felt by parents can sometimes be reflected in their desire to hide the child from the eyes of society.

> "If they have a child with a special condition, like Down syndrome, he will be in his room with a maid and will not see the world from birth until Allah takes his soul. I had one like that, till he turned 17, his father didn't take him out of the house. He went out of the house when his father retired. The old man now takes the boy with him; it has become difficult to move without him."
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a big city

> "If both the husband and wife are accepting of the disability of their child, I'm certain that things will go well. I discovered, by virtue of moving around in rehabilitation centers, that there are some husbands who don't accept this fact. They still refuse. They don't accept the situation of the son or daughter they have. They reject the idea of disability and are annoyed by it. I heard from a specialist that there were several divorce cases, more than one, due to the treatment of a disabled child, and things like that."
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a big city

On the other hand, the challenge of obtaining early diagnosis and thus early intervention, rehabilitation, and treatment from the newborn stage to early childhood and primary school stages has emerged. It is evident that residents of small and medium-sized cities, widows, divorcees, and low-income families suffer from a lack of access to centers that contain highly qualified and competent professional specialists. This forces them to bear the additional costs of travel, transportation, and purchasing good medical and rehabilitation services.

> "Doctor, what's the solution? He said: 'Look, so that you are aware, the region here has very weak capabilities for cases like this, so I suggest to you, because he saw me being responsive and so on, that you get a referral to a higher region like Riyadh, Jeddah, the Eastern Province, and the cities that have good medical services and consult with them. Look, first and foremost, your child need rehabilitation, that's all."
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a medium governorate

> "I started visiting clinics, I didn't leave a single clinic in Riyadh unvisited, and I went to clinics in Jeddah and the Eastern Province. Every time I heard about a psychiatrist, I try to go to them, till I find a doctor, may Allah reward her... Honestly, I owe her a lot because she guided us correctly and explained steps that we should follow, and pointed out that my child doesn't have autism; he has a spectrum disorder, but he doesn't have speech and communication skills."
>
> Father of a disabled child, who moved from a small town to a big city to get proper care for his son

> "Regarding competent specialists, I see many of them in medical centers, such as..."
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a big city

Parents shared the difficulty of finding practitioners in general specialties such as dentistry and pediatrics who can deal with people with disabilities, given the specific considerations required in dealing with this group in terms of communication and motivation during examination and treatment.

> "I see doctors in other specialties..." If you tell them about autism, they won't be familiar with the subject; they won't know how to help a child speak about their pain or how to deal with an autistic child.
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a big city

There is a difference in the experience of transferring a student from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development's day care centers to the Ministry of Education's schools, whether the regular schools that contain special classes (inclusive education) or specialized schools for students with disabilities.

The data showed that the disparity lies between the students' readiness and preparation, and that of their family, to move from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development's day care centers to schools, and the availability of a sufficient number of special education teachers in inclusive schools or specialized schools.

This disparity is evident in the performance of students with disabilities and their academic achievement results; some parents have reported a decline in the student's skills:

"I have previous experience with private special education schools; it wasn't inclusive, it was special education. Unfortunately, what I gained in daycare, I lost in grade one in private schools. Because the class already had 8 students with mixed disabilities, and there were two teachers, but they were doing their best. However, the multiple disabilities and different levels of the children were an obstacle for the teachers who couldn't focus on each child and give them all their energy."

Mother of a child with disabilities, a big city

Others mentioned that the inclusive education experience was positive, especially in girls' schools. They attribute the reason to the readiness of the school environment in terms of the students' interaction and the ability of special education teachers to follow up, supervise, and work on the students' individual plans, and provide them to the parents in a periodic and organized manner, ensuring safety and security measures for students with disabilities.

"I took her in the third term and integrated her into kindergarten in KG3. That third term, which was two months long, made a difference for her and brought about a qualitative shift in her whole life. She started sharing her ideas with people, playing with her nieces and nephews. She wouldn't hold me back; she'd eagerly take toys out of boxes and play. Yes, I went with her once or twice to the kindergarten and watched her from a distance without her noticing, thanks to their wonderful care. The class teacher was present along with the special needs teacher. They would take children to the playground, which was small and suitable for children with special needs. On the other side, the children with special needs would come and call my daughter to play with them. The teacher would say: "No, she's playing here." I was struck by how well these young children with special needs integrated, and how much my daughter connected with and understood them. If you see it, you may call it bullying. I don't feel it's bullying as much as it's an exploration. Other children were asking the teacher why she was small because it was common for people with special needs, especially children with Down syndrome, to be small. They were very small, so other children would come and say, 'Why is she small?' (hahaha). I mean, she's very small. She's in kindergarten. They were being friendly with her, playing with her, and it was a rich experience."

Mother of a child with disabilities, a big city

"Education is moving to the integration stage. This is a very important stage that links normal education with special education. We'll see after that, children leave here and will be received into the education system of inclusive schools, schools that accept children with disabilities and have inclusive classes classified according to disabilities."

Father of a child with disabilities, a medium city

> "They contact us for any feedback, any information…" His teacher contacts me almost daily, for any observation, anything, she contacts me immediately. For example, she tells me what he did, if there was progress or there was regression, etc."
>
> Mother of a child with disabilities, a big city

> "Thanks to Allah, it was very difficult for the teacher to come here, but with the way we treat him, he now loves to come."
>
> Mother of a child with disabilities, a big city

In families with one or more children with disabilities, there is an urgent need to bring in domestic workers, whose work is often not limited to cleaning the house and preparing food, but extends to caring for the child with a disability, especially during school holidays when the child is more present inside the house. One parent mentioned that there are facilities available for families of children with disabilities to bring in domesticworkers.

> "I have a maid for my son. He doesn't need one anymore, but they've become so attached. From the moment she enters, he tells her to make potatoes or do this or that. We've left them alone. We listen from afar."
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a big city

> "No, I got the domestic normally, but then I found out that her visa was for free."
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a big city

> "I don't feel that one maid is enough for housework where there is a child with disabilities. I feel that all I want is time for my daughter or my children. I mean, their goals, so that I don't waste time working or cooking or doing anything else. My time is for them."
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a big city

> "I need expenses for my children. I have a maid, and I had to bring in a second maid for them. I don't know how I'll deal with her if she comes. The situation is tiring, especially for people with special needs."
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a big city

> "I am a parent of this one disabled child, what about someone who has two or three? Sometimes the maid can't handle him, and I have to give her a salary raise to make her put up with him. She might not do her housework well to take care of this disabled child."
>
> Father of a child with disabilities, a medium city

It is worth noting that the parents of children with disabilities have stated that disability is costly and contradicts the principles of facilitation and ease. And that there is inequality when selling services to normal children and to children with disabilities, whether they are recreational, cultural, or social services.

> "Even at the club, when I bring my normal son in, they take him for a nominal price, but for my son with special needs, it's double the price. Why? They say he's a responsibility."
>
> Mother of a child with a disability, Riyadh

> "My child needs special care other than normal children. Why should this cost me? A normal child costs 4, and if he is a child with autism, they will take 6 or 8."
>
> Father of a child with autism, Riyadh

99
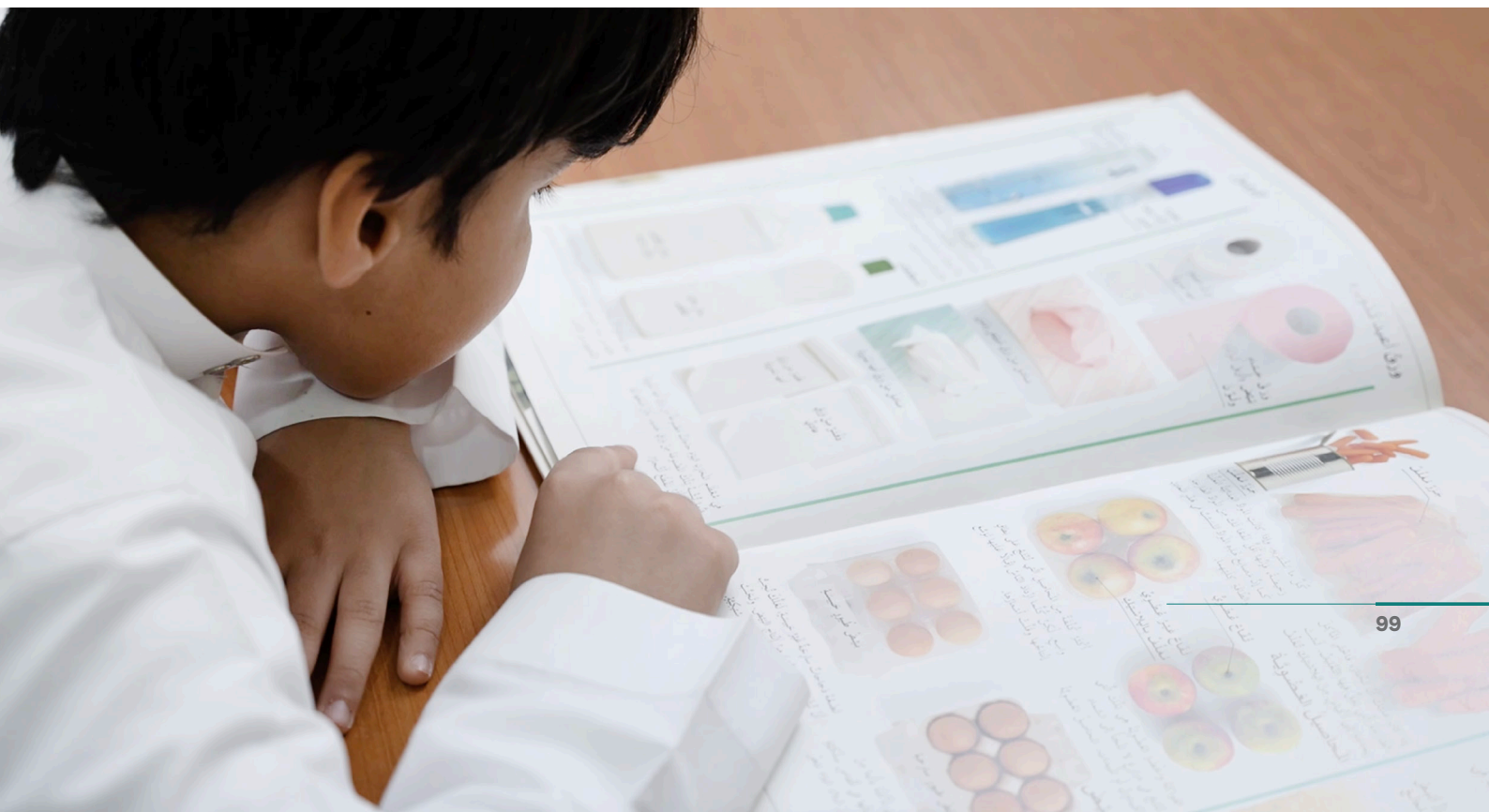
Children and their families are hurt by society's view of people with disabilities, especially their "look of pity" or lack of awareness of how to deal with children with disabilities in society.

> "The problem with our society here is that it doesn't understand children with special needs. I mean, their perspective on them. Sometimes a look, even a look, hurts." A look of pity, a look that implies they're strange or weird. And some people look at them with mockery and ridicule. We've seen some cases like that."
>
> Autism male specialist, a medium city

Parents agreed that there has been a clear improvement and a qualitative shift over the past five years in the extent of society's awareness and understanding of the meaning of disability, and that there are multiple types of child developmental disorders whose signs include behavioral problems:

> "I feel the last five years are better than the previous five years. The previous five years were very difficult, to the point that one of the mothers said: 'I have a daughter who I put in a room and she never comes out.'"
>
> Disability female specialist, a medium governorate

Despite the insistence of most parents in the research sample on the necessity of including their children with disabilities in society, especially in early childhood and primary school stages, and not isolating them, they sometimes face difficulty in being accepted by certain places. They see a need to continue awareness and education campaigns for society in general, and especially for future generations:

> "If I go out to a coffee shop or restaurant with my son, I'm always anxious and stressed. I'm afraid he'll break a cup. I'm afraid people will stare at him. I'm afraid people will criticize me, I'm always afraid."
>
> Mother of a child with disabilities, a big city

> "I go to restaurants and cafes, but no one accepts my son. If he makes a noise or drops a spoon or something, they stare. Yes, yes, it bothers them. So I get stressed and upset, and I don't want to bother anyone. But this is my son's nature, and I have to teach him and introduce him to new places. I have to withdraw."
>
> Mother of a child with disabilities, a big city

The most prominent characteristic among parents, especially mothers, is their solidarity with one another, and their patience and perseverance:

> "We are special, mothers of people with disabilities are special. Allah gave us a gift, unlike other people. We are special mothers because of our patience, because if we weren't strong and patient, He wouldn't have given us this gift. So we overcame this stage, thanks to Allah. We moved from the stage of denial to the stage of acceptance. The mothers started to care about their children's rehabilitation."
>
> Mother of children with disabilities, a medium city

VIII | Learning

Children spend a large part of their day and life at school in pursuit of knowledge and learning. Saudi Arabia has given increasing attention to developing the education system, especially with the launch of the Saudi Vision 2030. The Kingdom is among the G20 countries that spend the most on pre-university education. [50]

Percentage of the government expenditure on education as share of GDP (%)

Country	%
South Africa	6.1%
Brazil	5.5%
KSA	5.11%
UK	5%
Canada	4.1%
Japan	3.2%
Turkey	2.6

(x-axis: 0.0 — 1.8 — 3.5 — 5.3 — 7.0)
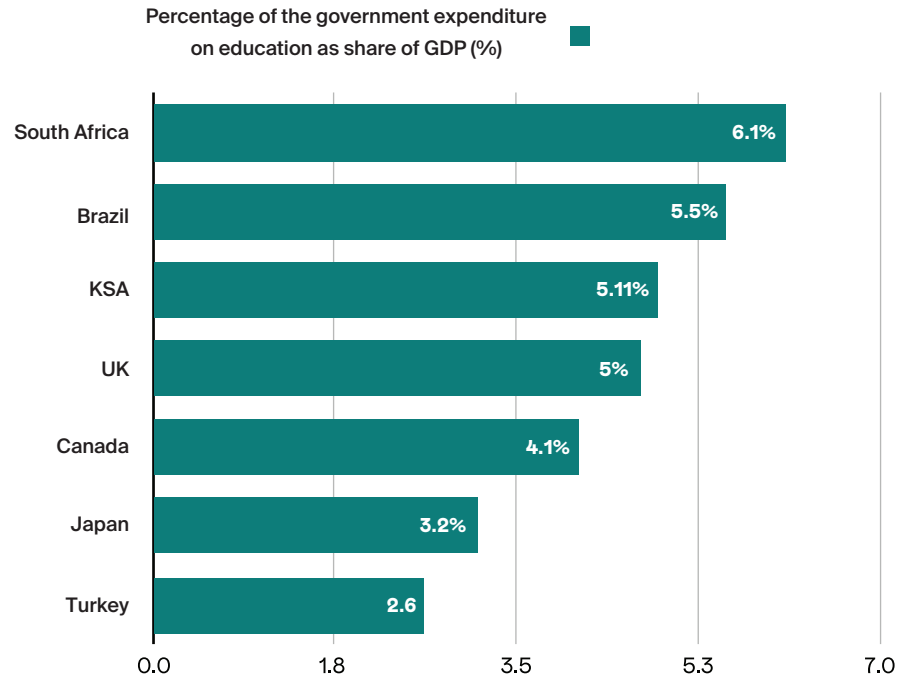
As for the outcomes of education, the Kingdom still faces challenges in this area compared to the performance of the G20 countries. According to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which assesses the performance of 15-year-old students in mathematics, science and reading in 81 countries in 2022, Saudi students achieved lower scores than the OECD average, with the lowest scores in mathematics and the highest in science, although there was a noticeable improvement in mathematics compared to their performance in 2018.[51] In general, concerted efforts are exerted to raise the levels of academic achievement in the Kingdom, most notably the allocation of an integrated program to achieve the Saudi vision (the Human Capability Development Program), which is concerned with raising the global competitiveness of the Saudi individual.

50. Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP) 2024. World Bank.

51. The Kingdom's performance levels in PISA tests: Mathematics (389 points compared to the global average of 472), Reading (383 points compared to the global average of 476), Science (390 points compared to the global average of 485).

مؤسسة الملك خالد
KING KHALID FOUNDATION

The results of the qualitative field research indicate that the child's learning experience varies according to the school, the teaching staff, and the students' relationship with their teachers. Overall, the results showed that there is a gap between school and home, and a blame game between school and parents, indicating an opportunity to improve communication between the two parties. Teachers find that parents need to better support the educational process, while parents complain about the many demands of schools, which they describe as incomprehensible - the large number of assignments, and the difficulty of monitoring their children's performance, which forces many parents to resort to private tutors who constitute additional burdens on parents. As for the children, it was clear in the sample that the child was aware of the importance of education in shaping their future, but the nature of the relationship with the teacher played a major role in making the child love the subjects and their academic achievement. The school's role in the social empowerment of the most needy groups was clearly evident. The sample showed individual efforts by teachers and counselors to empower these groups, such as providing break meals, school uniforms, and classroom activity materials. As for the experience of including children with disabilities, the sample agreed on the importance of developing it, qualifying the educational staff further to deal with the category of people with disabilities, providing shadow teachers, and further involving special education teachers in schools, especially in the kindergarten stage, which is a pivotal stage in the early detection of disabilities in children. School safety emerged as one of the most prominent challenges that worries children and their parents. The school emerged as one of the most widespread places for causes of harm to children, most notably bullying, which was discussed at length in Chapter **(V: Exposure to Harm)** School restrooms were one of the most dangerous places from the perspective of the child and their parents, where prohibited items are widespread.

1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Early Education and Kindergarten	Public Education	Academic and social empowerment of children through school	Student Counseling	Safety in Schools

Early education and kindergarten

Early childhood education and care are one of the most important determinants of equal opportunities, cognitive development, and school readiness. The literature indicates that children who attend high-quality education and care programs in their early years, especially in low-income families, have stronger language and social skills, and perform better in school and work. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs have become an integral part of comprehensive development policies in developed countries, especially in Europe and North America, where they are linked not only to educational growth, but also to women's empowerment and economic support.

Best Policies and Practices

1 Providing education and care for all children aged 0-5, free of charge or for a nominal fee

This is implemented in Sweden, Denmark, and France, where early childhood education and care programs are considered a state-supported public service.

2 Training and professional development programs for employees in the sector

As in Canada and Finland, provided that the employee must have a university degree or specialized diploma in early childhood.

3 Integrating education, nutrition, health, and psychological support services into one center

Known as the "Integrated Services Model", which is implemented in the United Kingdom and Australia.

4 One year of pre-school education at least is compulsory

It is implemented in countries such as Germany, Britain, and Japan.

According to the latest opinion polling of Saudis

20%

of parents. believe that the appropriate age for early education is 3 years old or younger.[52]

52. The results of a SCOP's survey conducted on a representative sample of Saudis in 2025, which was jointly funded by the KKF, Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation.

Over the past ten years, Saudi Arabia has succeeded in raising enrollment rates in early childhood education by 30% among children who have not yet reached the official age for primary education. [53].

Comparison of enrollment rates for early childhood education in the third, fourth, and fifth years of age (2022) [54]

OECD rate %			KSA			Japan			UK			USA			Mexico		
3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5
75%	89%	85%	1%	12%	45%	89%	98%	98%	100%	98%	0%	38%	63%	82%	37%	78%	73%

Distribution of Saudi opinions on the appropriate age for children to join early education

% ▪

	%
1 year(s)	0.9%
2 year(s)	4.1%
3 year(s)	15.2%
4 year(s)	29.1%
5 year(s)	38.1%
6 year(s)	10.5%
7 year(s)	2.2%

0.0   0.01   0.02   0.03   04
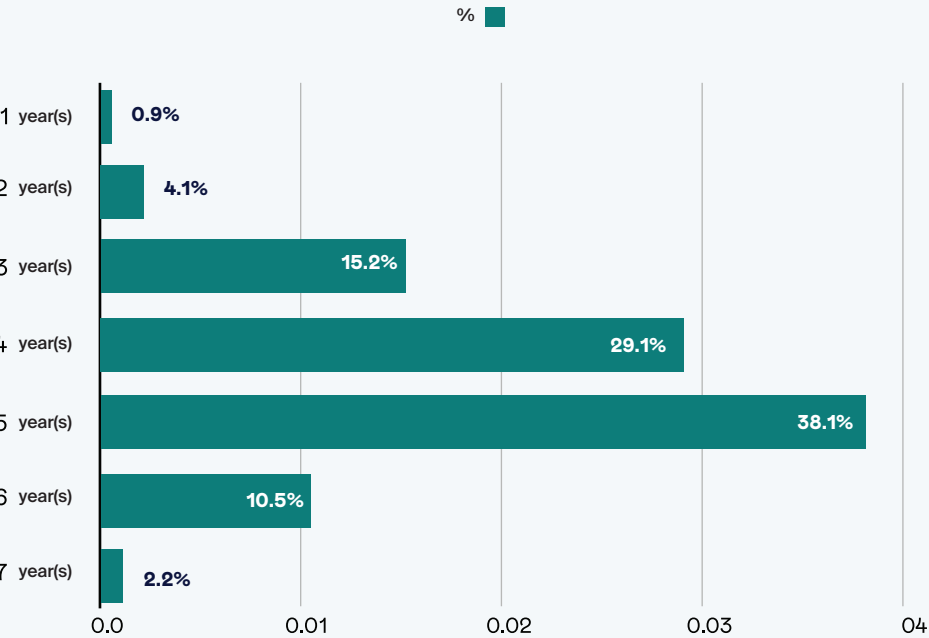
54,53. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2024, **"Education at a Glance 2024: OECD Indicators"**

The results of the qualitative field research on kindergarten workers showed that there are challenges facing practitioners; most notably the shortage of teachers and specialized staff, and the difficulty of working with the early childhood age group, which the workers described as time-consuming and laborious, while emphasizing the practitioners' love and passion for working with this age group of children, as observed by the research team.

> "Indeed, long weekends are beneficial for kindergarten teachers. As a kindergarten teacher, children drain my energy, and when I go home, I can't even hug my own children because I hugged 15 other children. I didn't say how many times a day I hugged those 15 (laughs). You might have done 50 times! "So, the long weekend gives me balance, and I can see their needs and the flood of requests I receive."
>
> Female kindergarten teacher, a big city

The staff had differing opinions on kindergarten curricula, but they agreed that there was a need to diversify the activities for this age group:

> "The curriculum is boring. The methods are more important. Technologies are more important. The outdoor games played in the yard should be changed. Yes."
>
> Female kindergarten teacher, a big city

> "Government kindergartens have changed their curriculum, and they now rely on experience rather than books. So I took my son out of an international school to a government one so that he would be taught the unified curriculum. I didn't feel that there was anything wrong with it, but teachers send us messages on the group asking what we think and what we should do. There is a plan, but there's no content. The new content of the Ministry of Education, which they call cognitive or innovation, is innovated by the teachers and children, meaning they fix the game together. But teachers are not competent, so they started asking us, the mothers, to help them."
>
> Employee in an association, a big city

Public Education

Saudi Arabia enjoys high levels of enrollment in public education, reaching 100% in primary education, as previously discussed in the School Absenteeism section (IV: Sedentary Lifestyle). The percentage of the Saudi population who completed primary education in the age group (14-16 years) reached 99%. [55]

Relative distribution of primary education completion rates by gender

Category	Completion Rate
Total	99.16%
Females	99.27%
Males	99.05%
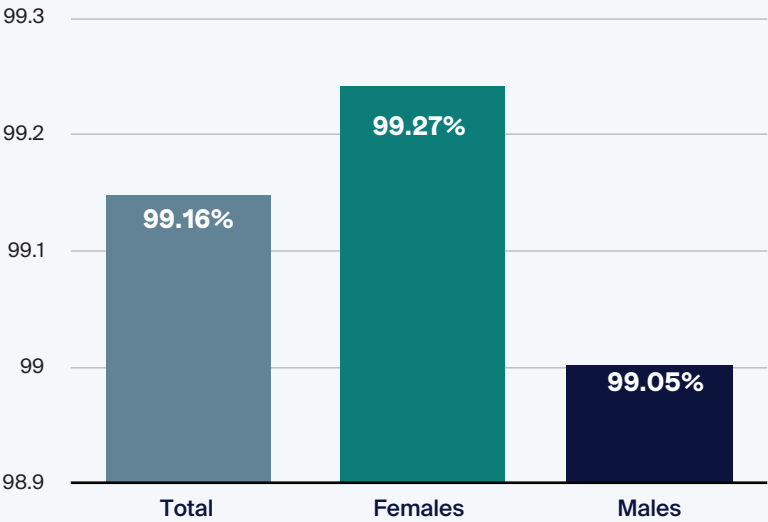
55. GASTAT (2024), **"Education and Training Statistics"**:

▶

We share the sample's results of the qualitative field research on the most prominent issues related to public education.

▼ **Homework**

Homework was mentioned repeatedly by the parents surveyed. The experience varied greatly, and it is not possible to determine the extent to which parents help their children with homework, the amount of homework given by teachers to students, or the time students spend solving homework. This disparity is attributed to the type of school and its academic system.

However, most parents complained about the large amount of homework and the long time their children spent completing it. The biggest complaint was about the school's repeated requests to print notebooks and activity sheets.

▼ An example of the variation found in the sample regarding the quantity of homework assignments and the time required to deliver them:

> "We have a lot of homework."
>
> Male teenager, 15 years old, a medium city

> "A platform in addition to the written assignments; this is too much."
>
> Mother, a medium city

> "Homework piles up on my child; memorization, along with assignments and the platform, how can a 3rd grade child keep up? Folders and projects!"
>
> Mother, a medium city

> "This applies to both boys and girls. No pressure. It's like a university system. You have a task that you can finish today, tomorrow, or on the last day of the task. This is one of the important things. It's not just the traditional assignments where a student has an assignment today and has to complete it tomorrow. No, in this system teachers give students assignments and give them time."
>
> Mother, a big city

The GASTAT's 2024 Education and Training Survey provides data on the time students of different age groups spend doing homework:

Percentage of the time spent by students aged 11-14 on homework [56]

School subject	Below 15 minutes			Below 30 minutes			30-60 minutes			More than 60 minutes		
	Males	Females	Overall	Males	Females	Overall	Males	Females	Overall	Males	Females	Overall
Mathematics	41.32	40.02	40.67	42.78	42.79	42.78	13.71	15.05	14.37	2.19	2.15	2.17
Reading / Writing / Linguistics	47.10	45.79	46.46	38.09	39.02	38.55	13.04	12.91	12.98	1.77	2.27	02.02
Science	50.88	49.90	50.39	34.11	34.67	34.39	12.79	12.74	12.77	2.22	2.69	2.45

It should be noted here that some parents in the field research sample spoke about their role in monitoring their children's studies and that they encourage them to study, either through direct personal follow-up at home or by creating suitable conditions for studying at home.

> "We'll finish lunch, then we'll focus on teaching them, doing homework, and studying. When dinner time comes, I'll finish everything and close their bags."
>
> Mother of orphans, a medium city

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56. **GASTAT 2024,** Education and Training Survey

Parents also became aware of the importance of the early school years and the importance of the student mastering writing, reading, and mathematics skills during these years, and that they help the child to learn and memorize in the coming years. Some parents also mentioned that their children's academic foundation was negatively affected by the Coronavirus pandemic and their transition to distance learning.

"Thanks to Allah, her teacher was also very strict with my child in the academic foundation... She taught her the basics correctly, and they are now in grade two. When my child return from school, I don't put pressure on her."

Mother, a medium city

GASTAT collected [57] some data regarding parental involvement in monitoring their children's educational progress, as follows:

Category	Percentage
Parents read books with their children	95.78%
Parents attend parent events	95.98%
Parents help their children understand mathematics	96.46%
The parents speak to their children's teachers about their academic progress	98.41%
Parents are aware of what their children are learning at school	98.89%
Parents teach their children about general information	99.26%

▼ **Private tutors**

Regardless of where they live or what type of school their children attend, some parents mentioned the need for private tutors in many cases, especially during exam periods.

"We spend a lot of money on their education. Five tutors or more... I really don't know if the problem is with the children or the teachers."

Mother, a small village

57. GASTAT 2024, Education and Training Survey

Parents facing the challenge of providing support to their children while taking assessment exams

Parents with children in high school reported the high level of stress they and their children feel, from being able to secure a seat to take the exam, to getting the desired marks. A parent of a student with a disability mentioned the lack of preparation and knowledge her son had regarding the nature of the exam.

> "I registered my son two weeks ago. His exam (aptitude test) is next week on Saturday, but my son himself has no idea about anything."
>
> Mother of a child with disabilities, a medium city

An example of the psychological stress and feelings of frustration that students experience after the results are released:

> "The first shock is when the student sits to take exams. Of course, everyone messes up when exams start. If the marks are low, the student will have to repeat the exams and study again. He may adapt after one, two, three to five times, but he may not get the grade he wishes in order to enter a major."
>
> Mother, a big city

An example of the difficulty in securing a seat to take an exam:

> "Mother: Last week, my daughter, may Allah protect her, was very anxious about the aptitude test because she wasn't admitted to take a seat.
>
> Research team: Did she register late?
>
> Mother: Yes, she was late, so there were no seats. She got nervous and upset."
>
> Mother, a big city

◣ Opinion on classroom systems

The majority of the parents surveyed agreed that the 3-term system is boring and long for students and parents, and is a reason for absenteeism and the decline in the level of studying. They wish to return to the 2-term system applied in the past.

Noting that the data for this research report had been collected before the Cabinet's decision to return to the 2-term system was issued.

> "Because of the 3-term system, the study has become boring for students, and when my son goes to school, many of the teachers are not there. When he came back from school the other day, I asked him: 'How many lessons did you have today?' He told me that he had two or three lessons, and when I asked him for the reason, he said that the teachers went on training courses."
>
> Mother of orphans, Riyadh

Those who supported the 3-term system are a minority and believe that it has positively reduced the pressure of lessons and studying.

> "From my point of view, and I'm afraid mothers will get angry with me, I'm one of the mothers who are happy with the 3-term system. Why? Because the curriculum has been reduced, and it is no longer divided into two halves like before, when we used to study about 4 or 5 chapters in one semester, and have them memorize and study them. Now the curriculum has been reduced and the teachers have used participatory and cooperative training methods and curricula."
>
> Mother, Al-Ahsa

◣ Absenteeism

The results of the qualitative research confirm the prevalence of this phenomenon, which was discussed under the experience **(IV: Sedentary Lifestyle).**

113

Academic and social empowerment of children through school

▼ Homework

Some parents mentioned many positive experiences about schools whose priorities include empowering students, whether by building the child's personality and enhancing their self-confidence, or by empowering them academically by developing individual plans for weak students and focusing on strengthening their skills, or by economic and social empowerment for the less fortunate groups, such as orphans.

Example of academic empowerment:

> "We have to proceed gradually. If I have a question in the curriculum, I'll ask a teacher. For example, my daughter faced difficulties with a teacher a few years ago. All the teachers have supervisors or trainers. I contacted my daughter's teacher, and we worked on improvement. We held a meeting to discuss my daughter's difficulties and the teacher's inability to understand her. We then created an improvement plan. And I kept following the plan to improve her so that she would reach a certain level, and I did it, and her level improved and she surpassed it."
>
> Mother, a medium city

The children in the sample agreed on the importance of school for them in shaping their future path, as evidenced by their expression of linking academic achievement with increased promising opportunities in the future:

> "Research team: Well, what will you benefit from the school? Improvement? Girl: It equips us with knowledge and educates us for the future. It enables us to get a job and enter university, maybe we will become ministers."
>
> Female teenager, 14 years old, a medium city

> "Space is my passion. It seems difficult. I mean, even medicine is difficult, but I hope I'll specialize in one of these fields."
>
> Female teenager, 15 years old, a village

Many students, especially in the primary stage, spoke about their preference for many subjects because of the teacher's personality. At the same time, many of the children in the sample spoke of having a negative relationship with a number of teachers at school, the most prominent result of which is aversion to some subjects because of the teacher's style and teaching method.

> "Research team: Are there any subjects you don't like? T: Chemistry, physics, mathematics, and English—all of them. Research team: Why! T: There are some awful teachers."
>
> Female teenager, 15 years old, a village

> "[I don't like] art. Because the teacher is very temperamental, and she hits. She hits me if the classroom isn't clean or something."
>
> Girl, 10 years old, a big city

> "I don't prefer mathematics because the teacher is nervous and we have to say the answer quickly. I like her."
>
> Girl, 9 years old, a medium city

◣ Social empowerment of the most vulnerable children

Field research has identified assistance for the most vulnerable groups in some schools through collaborative efforts by the teaching staff and counselors to support this most vulnerable group by providing meals, clothing or other necessities:

> "Research team: Okay, so regarding school, do you take your food with you, or do you get it from the canteen, or does the school give it to you?
>
> T: No, I take it from the canteen.
>
> Research team: Do you buy it?
>
> T: Not at the school's expense.
>
> Research team: Does the school give it to you for free?
>
> T: Yes.
>
> Research team: What meal does the canteen give you?
>
> T: Anything, but we must buy for 5 riyals.
>
> Research team: So you pay 5 riyals and get a meal?
>
> T: Not at the school's expense.
>
> Research team: Who pays?
>
> T: "The counselor.
>
> Male teenager, 15 years old from a low-income family, a small village

> "Mother: I have two girls who joined the talent show, and honestly, their paintings cost 1000 each. The first time, I made paintings for them, 250 each, but they didn't work, so I re-made them for the same amount.
>
> Research team: Did you, the parents, bear the costs?
>
> Mother: One of the teachers contributed and paid the costs of the second time."

Mother of orphans, a medium city

> "Mother5: "They do fall short with me, I swear to Allah. Teachers sometimes come themselves and see the girls who are a little struggling and bring them clothes.""

Mother, a low-income family, a medium city

▼ Experience of integrating children with disabilities into schools

Some parents praised the educational facilitative support, which includes providing educational vouchers to support families of children with disabilities who wish to enroll their children in special schools in early childhood, primary, and advanced study stages:

> "Educational vouchers, may Allah preserve and bless our country. Indeed, I was given educational vouchers, and I entered my daughter in the special education department."

Mother, a low-income family, a big city

> "Research team: If a girl, for example, needs money or comes to school without money, will the school assist her?
>
> Female teenager: Yes, the school staff will give her money. They also give art supplies to girls who can't afford to bring them at the expense of the student's counselor, may Allah bless her. They treat us very well."

Orphan girl, 15 years old, a village

Some of the parents surveyed in the sample resorted to avoiding enrolling their children with disabilities in government-run inclusive schools. According to these parents, these schools are less safe and lack many things to be a child-friendly environment for children with disabilities, for the following reasons:

1- Taking into account the parents' requirements to provide suitable seating and accessible facilities for children with disabilities.

"I didn't enroll my daughter in a government school because its staff is not responsive. This is something I want to emphasize, and I hope it reaches the Ministry of Education through you, because I couldn't. Government schools treat parents in a dismissive manner, and they don't raise parents' demands to higher authorities. At the beginning of the school year, I requested from the administrative staff of my daughter's school to see her classroom, where she'll be attending, but they completely refused to take me there. I requested that they show me the restrooms she will be using, but they absolutely refused. I told them my daughter is young and needs help so the ladies in the school's cleaning staff can assist her using the toilet, but they still refused. They said if I really need someone to look after my daughter, I should give one of the caregivers money to do this. Where is the attention and care for people with special needs? How will my daughter be integrated if this is the care the Ministry of Education announced it is provided in public schools?"

<div align="right">Mother of a child with disabilities, a big city</div>

2- Providing the necessary protection for children in general and for children with disabilities in particular. The parents surveyed believe that inclusive schools need a higher level of supervision, especially in the advanced stages of education.

"There's no control and my daughter might be harassed. There is harassment inside the schools. If it exists inside girls' schools, what about mixed schools? But in girls' schools, there's oversight from the administration and from female teachers themselves. They cooperate if they see a student with special needs... But I can't be sure (overlapping voices). The teacher may be absent. It's not like girls' schools, no. I saw girls' schools are different, but this is a mixed school, that's why I didn't enroll her in it."

<div align="right">Mother of a child with disabilities, a big city</div>

As for practitioners and teachers, workers in the field of kindergartens were the most aware of the importance of their role in the early detection of learning difficulties and disabilities:

> "The child was suffering from cognitive difficulties. One of the symptoms of these difficulties was that the child would suddenly, unconsciously hit their friend next to them with a stick. You know, this sudden, forceful hit can cause a reaction from children who would go home, and the mother of the child who was hit would complain... The violence wasn't just against the children; it was also against teachers. So we implemented a procedure and a plan to ensure that another teacher could sit with the child to help the class teacher and pay attention to them. But the problem continued until we sat down with the mother and asked for a report. After we received this report, it showed that the child had a problem requiring him to go to a one-to-one center until this problem is treated, and then the child can return to school again."
>
> Female supervisor in a nursery, a big city

At the same time, kindergarten staff reported the importance of having special education specialists within the kindergarten's teaching staff to support the early detection process and help staff deal with children with disabilities:

> "We really need specialists. Experienced individuals are better than those who work for the first time and try. For example, I had an experienced woman who worked here, and I benefited a lot from her in my first experience with children. Once, twice, three times, I was able to handle the situation, thanks to her. So I feel it is good to work with specialists, especially in these sectors where we need them."
>
> Female kindergarten teacher, a big city

The views of public education teachers and special education teachers agreed that public education teachers do not know how to deal with people with disabilities, or how to deal with developmental challenges, including stuttering. Spontaneous actions and personal efforts of these teachers, even when they are successful sometimes, do not replace specialized knowledge.

> "Public school teachers are still not proficient in dealing with people with special needs. Unfortunately, when they are in their classrooms, they get hurt, and this is wrong."
>
> Special Education Teacher

> "In inclusive education schools, public education teachers, even if they are kindergarten teachers, will not be able to deal with children with special needs."
>
> Special education teacher, early intervention

Practitioners, both locally and globally, emphasize the importance of shadow teachers to accompany children with disabilities on their educational journey within inclusive schools. The majority of mothers of children with disabilities who enrolled their children in inclusive schools were forced to accompany their children to school daily and attend the entire school day with them. Parents and teachers reported that the shadow teacher experience is currently financially borne by the parents:

> "Or they say: 'If you want, get a shadow teacher for your son,' and who pays for the shadow teacher? The mother."
>
> Special education female teacher, early intervention

> "There are specialized centers that provide you with a shadow teacher who has studied special education. You go to the institution and give them 100,000 per year to protect your rights by terms and conditions stipulating that, for example, if the teacher changes, there is a replacement for her, and they will even give you a shadow teacher that suits your child's condition."
>
> Female kindergarten teacher

> "The child needs a shadow teacher and a medical report, but does the school provide them? No, the child's family does."
>
> Female kindergarten teacher

The field research revealed a high level of acceptance of children with disabilities by other students in inclusive schools:

> "Even the girls started to like her (a child with a disability who is loved by the students of the school in which she was included)"
>
> Female kindergarten teacher

> "[We have a student with a disability] Sometimes his leg sticks out of the car, so he can't move it. I see some of his colleagues lifting his leg and putting it in the car. They keep him warm, bring him along, and help him. Sometimes, during PE class, they take him to a place far away from the ball so he can watch. They even help him to drink water. He moves his hand, but not in a certain way. Sometimes he holds the glass and drinks, but only as long as the glass is in his hand."
>
> Teacher, a medium governorate

Student counseling

Regarding the student counseling experience, despite differing opinions on dealing with the student counselor in schools and their role, the sample agreed on the importance of this role in supporting academic achievement and empowering children. Some children shared their experiences with the student counselor in guiding them towards correct behaviors and changing the way students think from negative to positive:

"

"Yes, we have counseling that always makes us positively look at things. For example, my thinking when I have a problem, or a situation that happened to me. For example, when I'm going to apply for a job now, I shouldn't say: 'Oh, I don't have any experience, I don't have any...What am I going to do? I won't do well, they won't hire me.' I should think differently; I want to get a job so that I can gain experience and learn, and have a better job in the future, and things like that. Counseling helps you always bring out the positive things in your subconscious mind."

<div align="right">Female teenager, 15 years old, a big city</div>

Counselors in schools that prioritize student counseling believe that the counseling experience in the Kingdom needs further development, especially in terms of staff training:

"

"I wish that the counseling programs we offer in our schools would be implemented in all schools, because frankly, the counseling program includes a guidance session. When I was a university student, I did an internship at a school. The purpose was to provide counseling sessions to students during free or extra periods. The good thing about this school is that counseling has a basic lesson, a curriculum, and a special schedule with a sequence and order that we follow. We know from the beginning of the year what we will talk to students about. We can add a specific topic in case we notice the students want us to talk about, so we stop the curriculum and talk about this problem and then we return to the curriculum."

<div align="right">Student counselor, a private school</div>

Safety in schools

We emphasize what was observed in **(V: Exposure to Harm)** regarding the bullying experiences that children go through in some schools, and children witnessing violence, in addition to what was discussed about the dangers in school toilets, which are considered among the most dangerous places by parents and children due to the prevalence of negative behaviors in them. The research sample of children shared the increase in safety levels in schools and in toilets as a result of the installation of surveillance cameras, in addition to the children talking about the role of the school principal in imposing discipline and monitoring violations:

> "In our school, there is no problem (talking about inappropriate behaviors), and our principal has installed cameras in the classrooms, corridors, toilets, and everywhere else, including the yard."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

Some children said that the presence of police outside the school played a helpful role in controlling behavior outside the school walls:

> "Drifting is impossible. Patrols and traffic police are stationed at the school parking areas. It is impossible to happen. They are present every day, and even in disguise."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

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Use of Technology

IX

Saudi Arabia has high levels of Internet access and usage, with the percentage of Saudis using the Internet reaching (92.5%) in the latest national statistics. [58]. According to some estimates, the percentage of children using the Internet in Saudi Arabia has reached 90%. [59]

We begin by looking at the total amount of time students enrolled in education spend daily using technological devices (smartphone, tablet, computer, or video games): [60]

Total time spent using technology devices each day by students attending education

Time	Saudi		
	Males	Females	Total %
I don't own any devices	8.27	9.78	9.02%
Less than 1 hour	15.57	17.05	16.30%
1-2 hours	32.34	34.07	33.19%
More than 2-3 hours	23.39	22.44	22.92%
More than 3-4 hours	10.49	9.06	9.78%
+4 hours	9.94	7.60	8.78%

In 2023, the Kingdom launched the National Framework for Online Child Safety to address digital risks such as cyberbullying, abuse, and digital exploitation, and to combat obesity and physical inactivity resulting from excessive use of technology. The framework aims to promote cybersecurity awareness, protect children from harmful content and dangerous behaviors, and provide a safe and child-friendly digital environment. The Family Affairs Council has launched a guide for parents and educators on ensuring the health, safety, and education of children in the digital world. [61]

But the challenge of children's safety on social media platforms is a global challenge, and it cannot be deterred nationally only. This is because most of the companies operating social media platforms are global, and the control of the technological aspect and what a child can be exposed to on websites is governed by algorithms and artificial intelligence.

58. GASTAT (2021)**, "Survey of Access & Usage Households & Individuals to ICT 2021"**

59. UNICEF press releases

60. GASTAT 2024, Education and Training Survey

61. **To view the guide**

The results of the qualitative field research showed that children's experience of using technology ranges between positive and negative, and is dominated by digital threats. One of the most notable results was that children were digitally superior to their parents, posing a significant challenge for parents in enforcing parental control. The majority of parents in the sample agreed on the importance of monitoring children rather than prohibiting them, because it is not possible to prevent a child from accessing digital media, but most parents seek to help their children browse safely. The children in the sample revealed their great attachment to technology, which led a large part of them to stop practicing their hobbies because of their preoccupation with their mobile phones. In some children, the degree of obsession with electronic games reached the point of adopting addictive behaviors, expressed clearly in their constant desire to play and their annoyance at repeated interruptions. As for digital friendships, they were very common among the children's sample. It was an experience that most children went through, but opinions varied on whether they preferred it or not.

Positive experiences of using technology

According to the results of the qualitative field research conducted by KKF, social media platforms and various websites provide tools that children and parents use to create positive experiences, the most important of which is supporting them in the learning process, completing assignments, and understanding better. For parents and practitioners, these platforms and websites are an important reference for learning methods of raising and teaching children.

> "I do my homework myself, but if something is difficult for me, I open Google or call my mom."
>
> Girl, 9 years old, a medium city

> "As for private tutors, I feel we don't need them anymore. YouTube is enough, and the platforms are available, so there's no need for private tutors anymore."
>
> Female teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

> "Girl: Look, I get the homework assignments from my phone. Sometimes they help us with writing or tests.
>
> Research team: How do you search using your mobile phone?
>
> Girl: I use a program.
>
> Research team: Like what?
>
> Girl: Like Kutubee, Hulul, Sahm, and other apps."
>
> Girl, 14 years old, a medium city

International experts encourage a focus on a set of essential skills, known as "21ˢᵗ century skills," including life skills, digital literacy, environmental education, arts, culture and sports, as well as risk awareness and ways to protect oneself from health threats, emergencies, disasters, assaults, fraud and misuse, both in the digital world and in people's lives. The skills we grow in children at an early age also protect them from future negative influences when they are exposed to harmful content in the media, online, or from peer pressure. When we instill in children a concern for healthy eating and a keen interest in tracking nutritional value rather than calories, we reduce the risk of them falling into eating disorders and gaming disorders.

Educational websites have become a resource for parents who encourage their children to use them for learning and simplifying **school subjects:**

> "I want my children to learn English. I give them YouTube videos, a notebook, and write the letters for them. I teach them about long and short vowel sounds, capital and small letters, and so on. They are doing well."
>
> Mother, a big city

At the same time, parents use these sites to train themselves to deal with their children better and to learn about parenting methods:

> "I really do attend courses online from time to time. What I really like most is watching YouTube videos about parenting and dealing with personalities, especially dealing with teenagers. I was used to listening to videos all the time that were helpful."
>
> Mother, a medium city

> "There are platforms and podcasts. My wife sometimes sends me clips to listen to. I see how to raise a child; it's actually useful. Some things come up, and there's a podcaster that I don't know the name of, but I always see her. My wife sends her videos to me. She talks about raising children, and her words are always very..."
>
> Father, big city

55%

of parents in Saudi Arabia reported that they use the Internet and social media as a primary source they rely on to obtain educational information.[62]

Parents' opinions about their educational information sources [63]

Source	Percentage
Internet	36.6%
Social media platforms	17.9%
I don't need educational information	17.2%
Relatives and friends	9.4%
Educational books	7.3%
Family or educational counselors	6.4%
Training courses	5.2%
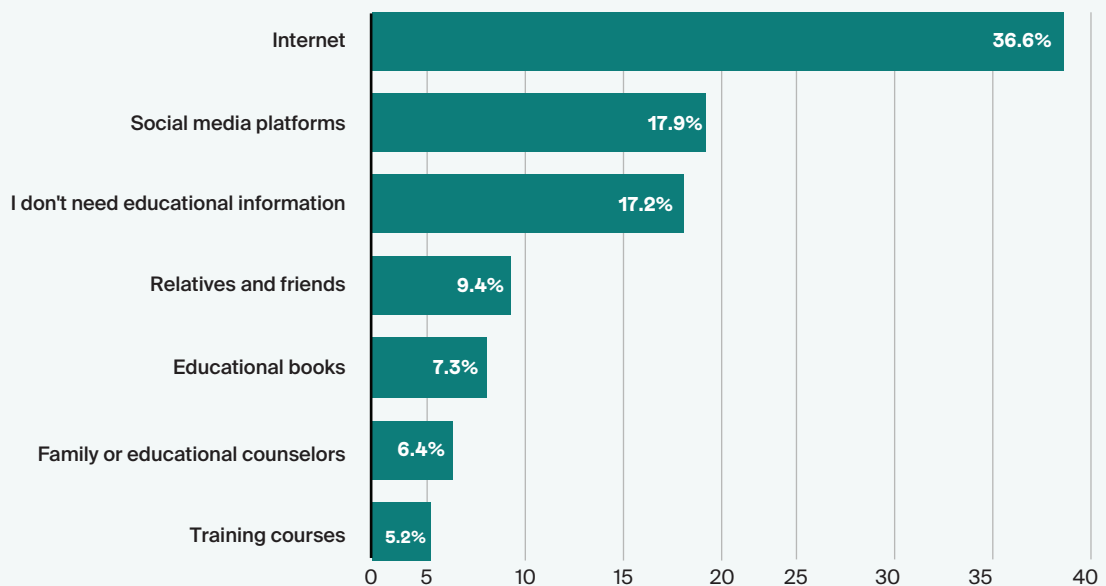
Practitioners spoke about distance learning courses as a method for developing skills and increasing qualifications, in addition to benefiting from professional content on electronic platforms:

> "Yes, there are online courses available that I sometimes save on my account, for example."
>
> Male practitioner, a medium city

Digital risks to children

In reviewing the digital risks identified by the qualitative field research, we note the spread of what has become known as the concept of "digital nursery," which is the use of screens and digital content for children under five years old to calm them down and occupy their time. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children under two years old should not be exposed to any type of screen, except for family video calls, and recommends limiting screen time for children aged 2-5 to one hour per day of high-quality content and under parental supervision. The recommendation extends beyond the time; it also encompasses the type of content and the method of interaction, with specialists encouraging what is known as "joint interaction" between the child and parents while using devices. [64]

Parents and children agreed that they spend too much time on their devices and on the Internet:

> "I feel like half their time is spent sleeping, and they spend too much time on devices!"
>
> Mother, a medium city

> "Because when they get up the following day, they will get busy with their mobiles. There will be no chance to speak with them, so I have to ask them what they did at school."
>
> Mother, a medium city

Technology has a significant impact on the patterns of activities and hobbies children engage in, and some children have spoken about their attachment to mobile phones, which has led them to abandon practicing some hobbies:

> "I have hobbies, but I don't practice them now. For example, I used to be a big fan of reading, but not anymore. I fell into the habit of using mobile phones. I wasn't a mobile phone enthusiast at first, but then I loved mobile phones. Since then, nothing else has happened in my life because all my time are spent on the mobile phone."
>
> Female teenager, 15 years old, a medium city

> "My son spends hours at home watching TV and playing (electronic games). He doesn't have a hobby like drawing or anything like that. He's a bit stubborn."
>
> Mother, a big city

64. AAP 2026, **"Media and Young Minds"**

Practitioners in the kindergarten stage spoke of difficulties in understanding and accurately diagnosing children's behaviors due to children's prolonged exposure to screens and devices, which affected their behaviors:

"

"Some behavioral problems have arisen recently because children have been spending a lot of time on electronic devices. We can't diagnose their behavioral problems because we are not the appropriate experts. Some problems are new to children. For example, a child raised in a healthy environment with no problems at home, but he has selective mutism and refuses to speak. A child who has a separation problem from his mother, and he has never experienced separation. A child who has a weakness in communication, visual or linguistic communication, sometimes he just needs integration, meaning he needs to be with children for a long period, someone to talk to him all the time. The mother and father are busy with work, and the child has few people who talk to him at home, so he does not have a linguistic repertoire at all."

Female practitioner, a kindergarten, a big city

Gaming disorder is one of the newest disorders officially recognized in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) issued by WHO, as one of the addictive behaviors that has begun to receive great attention in medical science, in addition to gambling disorders and eating disorders. Gaming disorders are more prevalent among teenagers than other age groups, with a prevalence rate of 3.3% among the global population (higher among males) [65] and 8.6% among teenagers. This type of disorder is becoming more widespread over the years due to the growth of digital technologies and video games. [66]

As for monitoring, tracking, and downloading digital protection programs on children's devices to activate parental digital control, many parents emphasized their commitment to verbal communication with their children, instilling trust in them, and promoting self-control, especially during adolescence. As for early childhood and primary school stages, the majority agreed on the need to monitor the content that attracts the attention of this group, especially YouTube videos. Despite the concern, parents did not show sufficient knowledge or awareness of digital protection tools. Unlike their children, who have high technological skills.

"

"As far as I'm concerned, all my children have devices, but none of them have apps, such as TikTok, Instagram or Snapchat. Only the eldest daughter has them, and for example, she doesn't say at home that she has them. I or their father can take any device anytime. M1: There is no private message, and we have already linked half of them to the father's email and the other half to my email. So, any search on the search engine, YouTube or Google, will appear to me or their father. M4: Any game is downloaded for them and for us. One of my children asked: 'Mom, how did you find out?' I said: 'It's not your business.'"

Mother, a big city

65. **Prevalence of gaming disorder:** A meta-analysis. 2022

66. **Burden of gaming disorder among adolescents:** A systemic review and meta-analysis. 2025.

"My children play PlayStation games and use mobile phones. When they get messages that aren't good or anything like that, they say to me, 'Mom, we got this. Mom, this happened to us. Mom, we blocked so-and-so. He did this to us or talked to us like that.' There's nothing like that happened with my children, because I just chat with them normally."

<div align="right">Supporting mother, divorced, working, a medium city</div>

"Your role is to monitor, not to prevent."

<div align="right">Mother, a big city</div>

I feel like someone needs to pay attention to their children. The little ones and the elder ones, they both know. Young people shouldn't get involved with bad things. I try to monitor the phone and not let my daughter have free rein; it's not right. Many things harm children and can ruin everything; it's not right. We have to care about them; there are things I should talk to them about, like not to always close the room door. I'm responsible for them."

<div align="right">Mother, a village</div>

"Our children use mobile phones, TikTok, and games extensively. We should monitor and warn them about strangers."

<div align="right">Mother, a village</div>

Most of the children in the sample reported experiencing harassment attempts through social media or games:

"I used to use my personal photos and videos in my accounts, but I don't now. I stopped because I felt it was not nice that I was getting things in the comments that weren't okay. So I deleted them immediately. It's nice and positive to use personal photos and videos, but I get annoyed. (Hahaha) For example, It's like street flirting. I don't like this, and if someone does it in the street, I'll yell at them. I can't yell at them in the comments because I might get banned. So, I deleted the comments and videos."

<div align="right">Female teenager, 14 years old, a small city</div>

> "There are two games, one I don't know its name, but it's about creating characters, buying things, and doing tasks to earn money. You enter maps, chat, and sometimes you have a microphone, I think. The second game is Roblox, which is the most popular game. You talk to people, add them, and chat with them. It has a microphone. I don't talk in chats much. Sometimes I add players and chat with them, then I find they've suddenly blocked me, and some of them are rude, so I'm just playing on my own."
>
> Female teenager, 13 years old, a small city

According to the latest opinion polling of Saudis

65%

65% of Saudis believe that children under 15 in the Kingdom are exposed to films, games, or content that is inappropriate for their age. [67]

In the world of electronic games, children are exposed to interacting with people of different ages and are open to topics and language inappropriate for their age:

> "No, I mute the microphone because some of the people I play with swear, so I mute it so my mom doesn't hear them."
>
> Boy, 9 years old, a big city

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67. A SCOP's 2025 survey conducted on a representative sample of Saudis, and jointly funded by the KKF, Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation.

▶

Many children shared their experiences of making friends through the digital world, or what they called "digital or online friends," as online friendships have become popular:

> "There are online friends and real-life friends. Most of the real-life friends were from elementary school, and we got to know each other. There's one I met in middle school, and currently, we're friends, and our friendship is really good. As for the online friends, it's normal; I got to know them through Instagram, and some of them through Snapchat."
>
> Female teenager, 14 years old, a small city

> "Half of my friends have online friends."
>
> Female teenager, 16 years old, a big city

> "Yes, three friends, and all of them are my age, one in (another city), one in (another city), and one in (another city). Research team: Yes. How did you get to know them? T: I got to know them through games. Research team: Which game? T: COD and we became friends (...) outside of the game. We added each other on Snapchat and Instagram and started chatting there."
>
> Female teenager, 15 years old, a village

A digital friend provides a refuge for many children to express themselves or try to cope with difficult circumstances they face:

> "I was used to turning to my online friends because I couldn't confide in my mother as she was under a lot of pressure."
>
> Girl from a family experiencing domestic violence, 12 years old, a medium city

The results showed that there is a group of parents who accept the idea of a digital friend for their children and support their children in communicating with them:

> "I met someone on Snapchat or TikTok, no, TikTok. She was of a different nationality and lived in another city. I got to know her, and then suddenly, by chance, we became friends. My family traveled to (another city) at the same time. We said, 'Let's meet up,' and our mothers started chatting while we were sitting together. It was really nice.
>
> Research team: Wow, did you meet her? It's not like you just have TikTok between you two.
>
> Student: Yes, but first I made sure and introduced the girl to my mom. I told her it was okay to be friends. I let my mom know who she is. I mean, not just anyone. You have to make sure about the person. Some people pretend to be someone else. I need to be sure of the person I'm talking with."
>
> Female teenager, 15 years old, a big city

Other children have come to dislike this type of friendship because of a bad experience they had:

"Because I don't get involved with anyone, and I'm not going to believe anyone because there is so much lying and fraud in society I befriended someone on PlayStation and I thought he was trustworthy and all that, but when we communicated on Snapchat and social media, I discovered that was thinking badly and I saw that he smoked and used drugs and hashish. So, I left him and I no longer trust anyone. But, by chance, I got to know someone, and his father, praise be to Allah."

Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

A group of children expressed their dislike for this type of friendship in the digital space, due to the difficulties and irregularity of communication:

"Research team: Do you have any online friends you haven't met in person?

Girl: Yeah.

Research team: What do you think of this experience?

Girl: Not nice.

Research team: Why?

Girl: I don't know, it's like when someone misses a person, that's why I always miss them. I have a good friend (unclear word) that I haven't seen her yet."

Girl, 13 years old, a village

"I went through it, but I didn't like it. I prefer real-life friendships."

Female teenager, 15 years old, a small city

X Transition to Adulthood

This section discusses the last years of childhood and the challenges these children face in transitioning from childhood and adolescence to adulthood, in addition to reviewing the experiences of children who play caregiving roles within their families, which necessitates their transition to adulthood before its time, and the behaviors that result from these experiences.

Perhaps the most significant challenge that the KKF re-identifies in this research is the difficulty of reaching and communicating with this age group (see Research Report: Reaching the Future: Journey of Youth between Employment, Education and Training), which largely expresses the orientations of children at this age as they move towards adulthood. Practitioners in childhood research and specialists in providing programs dedicated to adolescents agree that there are difficulties in reaching this age group and attracting them to programs.

> Research team: What challenges are you facing?
> "Female practitioner: Honestly, how do I attract them? That's the biggest challenge. I mean, what incentives I can offer them.
>
> Female practitioner in an association, a medium city

Report: Reaching the Future

KKF's Publications

The results of the qualitative field research showed that the transition to this age stage is a thorny process, according to parents, who find it very difficult to prepare their children for puberty and to convey the necessary information to them. Children's experience at this stage is dominated by intense anxiety versus what practitioners have described as "apathy" towards the future. While parents shared the extreme anxiety their children experience in preparing for the transition to university and undergoing assessment tests, practitioners emphasized that young people at this age are far from knowing themselves, their interests, and charting their future path. Given these adverse results, there is a need for a greater understanding of the needs of this group by those working with young people. As for peers, their influence is amplified during this period, and this influence is evident in the social risks that children face, such as smoking, drug experimentation, and, in some cases, involvement in crime. Obsession with digital games was present in the qualitative data for this age group. As for children who have not reached adolescence or adulthood, the qualitative results showed that the burdens of care imposed by the absence of the role of parents for various reasons forced them to move to adulthood prematurely.

The results of the transition to adulthood experiment will be reviewed through the following themes:

1 Puberty	2 Educational challenges	3 Knowing yourself, your interests, and charting your life path	4 Social risks	5 Digital addiction	6 Burden of care

Puberty

All the parents in the sample agreed that puberty and adolescence are a critical and sensitive stage in a child's life. Despite this understanding, the parents expressed their confusion on many issues, especially social matters that do not necessarily align with family customs and what some parents perceive as a rebellion against traditions.

> "Because all of them have become open-minded and deviant."
>
> Mother of orphans, Najran

The role of the curriculum has emerged as supportive in helping parents to start talking to their children about this topic and to use the information contained in the curriculum to know the limits of dialogue with children, indicating the parents' lack of knowledge of the appropriate way to engage in this dialogue:

> "I didn't talk [about sexual topics with my children]. I was really embarrassed. But then one of my children asked me a question, and I didn't answer him; I dismissed him. He said: 'Are you going to teach me or should I search on the Internet?' I was shocked! It was as if someone slapped me, and I said: 'No, come here, we've already started talking.'"
>
> Mother, a big city

> "My experience is that my son is now in the third year of middle school. When he first entered the first year of middle school, he would come and ask me: 'Mom, What does puberty mean?' I gave him the overall definition. I told his father to talk to him in detail.
>
> Mother, a small city

> "There is a lesson in fifth or fourth grade (...) Because the curricula have become helpful (...) This type of curricula is what allowed us to find an entry point."
>
> Mother, a small city

> "When my child asks, I should answer with a well-defined, structured, and studied piece of information. Even when you open the book (talking about the content of one of the curricula), you'll find my limits are like this: Don't elaborate too much, nor do I shorten it, because he has some information."
>
> Mother, a small city

Educational challenges

The obsession with academic achievement has become very prominent among this age group, which is preparing to move from school to university. This caused them high stress, and one of the most significant things that caused psychological pressure on the children and their families was the stage of taking assessment tests. Parents with children in high school reported the high level of stress they and their children feel, from being able to secure a seat to take the exam, to getting the desired results.

The stress that children experience at this stage has physical and health consequences, which were clearly discussed by the parents in the sample:

> "Mother5: It's true, my daughter got sick in her third year of high school with a stomach bug. "Mother1: Yes, all of them complain from their stomachs, colon, etc. "Mother5: Yes, it exhausts them to the point that I told my daughter, 'Don't go to university until you recover your health.' "Mother1: They don't want to leave and they don't want to go. "Mother5: Yesterday, she said she was terrified! That's how she went, to the point where we took her down, and I told her to stay this year. She told me she wanted to go to university, and I said: 'I swear to Allah, you're not admitting.'"
>
> Group of mothers, a big city

A group of teachers agreed that the assessment tests (aptitude, achievement, and measurement) are difficult and constitute a high source of stress for students:

> "In recent years, the aptitude and achievement tests have become very difficult for students, and I have noticed this with my son. The time has become tight for coordinating between his high school, the aptitude test, and preparing for the achievement test. There is also a fourth test, the English STEP test, so now a student has four tests that are supposed to determine their path and future."
>
> High school male teacher, a large city

Given the increasing focus on these tests, some teachers are seeing the importance of the school having a greater role in preparing students for these tests:

> "Most people think about aptitude and achievement tests more than they think about school."
>
> High school teacher, a large city

> "School is supposed to provide the learning resources for achievement and aptitude tests, but we have noticed lately that the learning resources are external courses, not just outside the school, but even extend outside the country." Courses on the Saudi curriculum are delivered from outside the country (an Arab country).
>
> High school male teacher, a large city

Knowing yourself, your interests, and charting your life path

The practitioners in the field research sample spoke extensively about what they described as the "apathy" towards the future that some young people are experiencing at this time, and that there is an urgent need to intensify programs and courses aimed at this age group to motivate them to chart their future path clearly.

> "I discovered that most young people don't have goals. They just say: 'Let's leave it to Allah.' For example, during the recent university admission, many young people said: 'I don't know what major to apply for. Anything will do. I'll just arrange what I know?"
>
> Male practitioner in a social development association, a medium city

> "Even the issue of paying attention to the educational aspect, with achievement courses, aptitude, the specialized field at the university level, self-discovery, personality discovery, they are no longer interested."
>
> Male practitioner in a social development association, a medium city

> "Most of the students I notice are living in a childhood atmosphere and need some kind of guidance and warning. Regarding the students' future, their grades, what the cumulative percentage is, what the normal percentage is, what the aptitude is, and what the achievement is. They are currently in a state of uncertainty and are unaware of their future and needs some kind of guidance."
>
> High school male teacher, a large city

It is noticeable in the sample that non-profit associations and organizations excel in providing this type of programs and courses, and that there is a passion in providing it and a belief in its impact on young people:

> "Some of the programs are designed here, and some of them we receive ready-made. For example, we implement a program, not about early childhood, which is a controlled, studied, and complete program. It provides specific values, study and apply them, and link them with entertainment so that children are more receptive to them. They comes to us with a happy heart wanting what we deliver. So, programs are different."
>
> Female social worker in an association, a small city

> "Research team: Well, what about the training content?
>
> Female employee: The content can be specialized; for example, we have a female specialist in relationships and bullying."
>
> Female employee in an association, a medium city

> "Training packages that cover religious, health, sports, and psychological aspects, and a set of other packages, I don't know who is responsible for them. These packages come to us from Riyadh, and those in charge of them are people and trainers."
>
> Male social worker in an association, a small city

The children praised the impact of these programs on their self-discovery and career path:

> "We took courses, such as Wamd and the youth summer club. I took them both. They have benefited us in many ways, teaching us how to achieve our future path, how to take the right path, and how to manage our lives."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

> "I learned about communicating with people, using body language and gestures, and how will the university be different from the current stage of high school"
>
> Female teenager, 17 years old, a medium city

> "I became more social (as a result of the association's programs). I go around and chat, and I gained confidence."
>
> Male teenager, 16 years old, a small city

Social risks

▼ Smoking

One of the behaviors that children discussed at length as being widespread was the prevalence of smoking and tobacco products among children. Especially e-cigarette (vape) products and tobacco, which they talked about at length, even among middle school children, driven by peer pressure. The children demonstrated how easy it is to acquire these products through online stores or by purchasing them from retail stores, or sometimes on their own or through their older peers.

> "For example, the spread of electronic shisha, the spread of smoking, and the spread of things like staying up late and outside the house sometimes. In the middle education stage, the spread of the vaping phenomenon begins, where bad students are trying to lure as many people as possible into it. There are websites where they buy them and have them delivered here, or for example, someone older than them, like their older friends, gives them the money and they buy them. It is very widespread, they even bring it inside the school. Penalties include a parent app and discounting behavior marks. They are trying, but if, for example, a student is in advanced stages of addiction, it is difficult to convince him to quit. Honestly, it would be better if there were awareness programs about the dangers of shisha, because, as I told you, it is spread is widespread, especially in our school where tobacco was widely used.
>
> Male teenager, 18 years old, a medium governorate

> "[Supermarkets] sell [cigarettes], they sell them even if you are 6 years old, the most important thing is their business. Their business comes first, and they don't care about the harm they cause. I see a lot of supermarkets. If you think of telling some of the storekeepers or salespersons about this, they would say to you: 'It is none of your business' or 'Their father always sends them to buy cigarettes for him.' They mean that I should shut up."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium governorate

> In the middle education stage, the spread of the vaping phenomenon begins, where bad students are trying to lure as many people as possible into it.
>
> Male teenager, 18 years old, a small city

Generational gap

A clear gap emerged between the teenage generation and their parents' generation, at varying levels. Parents also expressed the strong influence of friends at this stage, as teenagers are dominated by a love of exploring new things that may be far from what their parents are used to.

> "The principal told me that she caught them and found mobile phones and a vape with them. I said: 'What is a vape?' This is the first time I've heard of it. She said, 'Mom, it's electronic cigarettes.'"

Mother of orphans, a medium city

> "My husband passed away, and my son is just starting adolescence. The first thing I saw with him was an electronic cigarette. Of course, I couldn't bring myself to confront him directly, so I asked: 'What's this?' He said: 'It's a flash drive.' I said, 'Okay, bring the laptop, let's see what's on the flash drive.' He said: 'It doesn't work...' Then he came to me and said, 'Mom, this is an electronic shisha. My friends gave it to me. It made me forget my father's death and many other things...' Then, when he finished speaking, I said: 'First of all, I don't want you to consult me... Allah gave you electronic means. Search for it, if it's good for your health, I'll allow you to have two or three; I have no problem with that. But if you find it's harmful, I won't forgive you because your sister has no one to rely on but you...' It might take him a month or two, then he'll quit.
>
> Research team: Did he stop it?
>
> "Mother1: Yes, he did."

Mother, a big city

According to the latest opinion poll of Saudis

57%

believe that shops are increasingly selling cigarettes, tobacco, or vapes to children. [68]

According to the latest opinion poll of Saudis

38%

believe that the phenomenon of parents allowing children to be in places where cigarettes or shisha are smoked is widespread.[68]

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68. A SCOP's 2025 survey conducted on a representative sample of Saudis, and jointly funded by the KKF, Saleh Kamel Humanitarian Foundation, and Abdulkadir Al Muhaidib Social Foundation.

▼ Aggression

Aggressive behaviors are prevalent in this age group due to psychological pressures, which were clearly discussed by the adolescents in the sample, especially who witness fights and the use of violence between peers:

> "There are problems [at school] like this. For example, stabbing. Not with a knife, with a pen. I see them gathering and fighting. School punishes them because a student has a large stab wound in a fight and are in intensive care, and they arrested the student who did that. Fighting happens among students, and sometimes between a student and a teacher."
>
> Male teenager, 13 years old, a village

> "I swear, before I entered high school, there were stabbings and guns."
>
> Male teenager, 17 years old, a medium governorate

> "One day they challenged each other and stabbed dogs. They stabbed them with pens. They were of my age or a little older."
>
> Boy, 12 years old, a village

Digital addiction

Among this age group, there is a widespread obsession with digital games and digital presence, to the point that it becomes their main preoccupation and what makes them feel most euphoric and self-actualized:

> "[My ambition] Umm, the first thing I want is to get a job, get an apartment, and then I'll start playing. Because I am a person who likes to play. I go and play with the girls I know. I am a social person on websites. I'm a gamer. I play and make relationships. My mom always tells me, 'We have things to do at home, your siblings will be influenced by you, that's enough.' I'd be sad... So I want to get an apartment so I can play comfortably without anyone bothering me like this (my people). I get stressed when someone gives me a task to do while I'm playing. I don't like that, especially if it's a war game. For example, when I play a COD game, my mom tells me, 'Why are you like this? Go wash the dishes, help your brothers with their homework, teach this one how to read.' When I'm playing, I can't do anything; anything will stress me out. Of course, I have been releasing my energy into playing games since I was little. I was playing with my cousin. My cousins were playing Minecraft and building. I saw things they were building, and I was amazed by them. I said to my mother that I wanted to buy something like that. I bought the game. I was wasting time on it, so I don't get distracted by my mom. I get distracted. I have to close the game and go do what my mother wants. I get distracted and I want to release my energy in this game. For example, let's suppose that I didn't have a PC or a mobile phone or any of these things, my life would be completely empty. I would be sleeping all the time. I play games to kill time."

Female teenager, 14 years old, a medium governorate

Burden of care

Some children in this age group take on exhausting caregiving roles and make them older than their age, as a result of the loss, absence, or incapacity of a parent. In rural environments in particular, the pattern of excessive responsibility among sons, such as 'I am the man of the house,' emerges, which may lead to premature maturity at the expense of emotional development.

In many interviews, teenagers expressed that they gained independence suddenly rather than gradually due to family circumstances, such as going to school alone or taking care of siblings:

> "I go [walking] at 6 o'clock because the school is nearby. My sister and I are going just because it's very close. I feel safe, but my sister would be afraid of the workers in the street. I don't know, she gets scared and comes after me, gets nervous. I would tell her there's nothing to be afraid of, they were just doing something. [The workers] didn't say anything, they were just cleaning and building. [If someone confronts me] I will ignore it, run away, and disappear."
>
> Girl, 9 years old, a medium city

> "T: "My mother has to work, and I take care of the house, look after my siblings, clean the house, and finish up. I also have a Quran recitation class where I listen. Every now and then we take development courses and learn things."
>
> Female teenager, 17 years old, a village

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Diagnosis of Childhood in the Kingdom

Understanding the childhood experience and the paths a child goes through in their life is important in designing solutions and policies that support the family and the child. This will enable the child to live enough positive experiences and enjoy the well-being they need to face the challenges of life that they may encounter in their childhood, so that they move into adulthood with resilience and psychological strength, and armed with the important life skills to chart their own life path.

The previous analysis highlighted that children in Saudi Arabia face several challenges in their various life paths. Some of them are formed even before birth, since the parents' decision to marry. This is clearly evident in the parents' lack of awareness about the importance of family planning and reproductive health safeguards during pregnancy and childbirth. When children are born, the analysis revealed the prevalence of misconceptions about the best ways to care for newborns, especially regarding breastfeeding and proper nutrition. This indicates a deficiency and weakness in parenting skills, and the need for parents to receive support, guidance, and increased awareness and knowledge in the areas of care. The analysis shows a decline in the role of the mother and father in the face of a significant increase in the role of domestic workers, as mentioned by all members of the sample, which has observable educational consequences on the child's behavior, values, and even language.

As for children living in a family that has lost one of its parents due to divorce or death, they suffer from different challenges, which increases the responsibility of their parents to help their children cope and overcome, and requires the separated parents to adopt healthy separation skills, and not turn their children into a battleground to settle scores and take revenge on the other party at the expense of their children.

Children in the Kingdom also need public spaces outside the walls of the home and school to practice their activities and hobbies. The analysis showed that there is a significant deficiency at the city level in providing these spaces and entities where this type of activity is available. As for the digital space, which has become one of the most welcoming places for children, there has been an urgent need to regulate it to be safer for children and protect them from the threats of bullying, harassment, grooming, and exposure to inappropriate content, as well as protecting them from the danger of digital addiction and social isolation.

As for the learning experience, it emerged as an academic and social enabler for many children in the Kingdom. All the children agreed on the importance of education for their future. Many children shared positive experiences in their relationship with teachers, which was reflected positively in their academic achievement and their love for school subjects. They also shared negative relations with some teachers, which made them reluctant to study some subjects because of these negative relations. There is a growing gap between school and home, expressed by teachers and parents through an exchange of accusations. The school believes that parents are not sufficiently present in their children's educational process, while parents complain about the school's excessive demands and the neglect of teachers and administration staff. Among the shocking experiences addressed in the analysis are the problems of harm and risks to which children are exposed. From being subjected to severe bullying within the school walls, to being subjected to harassment in the street, at school, and within the family by relatives and through screens, and the threats that children face of committing crimes and using drugs. One of the most prominent negative behaviors spread by peer influence was the spread of smoking among children, and in particular, the spread of e-cigarettes or vapes.

Repercussions of malnutrition on children are reflected in obesity and overweight indicators. There is also a lack of dietary diversification among children in light of the spread of fast food and other temptations that attract children, due to the spread of high-sugar foods in school canteens and in supermarkets frequented by children, and their attachment to fast-prepared meals high in salt and fat.

The experience of disability in Saudi Arabia has become strongly linked to childhood. and to the missed opportunity for early diagnosis in the early years of a child's life for disabilities caused by cerebral palsy in particular. The health system is also unable to prepare parents and provide them with necessary resources to care for their children.

We conclude this diagnosis by reminding that the childhood experience in the Kingdom is governed by whether or not parents practice parenting skills, and the extent of their presence in their lives to ward off the effects of negative experiences that the child goes through, and to create opportunities for positive experiences that the child needs to go through to reach well-being and self-realization.

The next chapter discusses solutions recommended by practitioners and specialists locally and globally, in addition to reviewing the results of programs and interventions implemented by a number of peer countries, in an attempt to devise appropriate solutions for protecting the next generation of Saudis.

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Chapter 2
Solutions

Next Generation of Saudis
Childhood in Saudi Arabia

Solutions

The challenges facing Saudi children are no different from those facing other children around the world, such as cyber threats, abuse, bullying, gaming disorders, the dangers of smoking, malnutrition, etc. That's why experts around the world and in the Kingdom have been actively studying these challenges, designing innovative solutions for them, and measuring their impact. This chapter focuses on reviewing practical zero- or low-cost solutions, identifying interventions proven successful in more than one country with evidence, proof and impact measurements. These interventions address childhood challenges in the Kingdom, based on qualitative and quantitative research findings, and are adapted to the Saudi context and local experiences. The report relies on the feasibility of the solutions that are most cost-effective and value-driven, have the least impact on the country's public budget, and are most sustainable in enhancing children's quality of life. This is achieved by focusing on prevention, proactiveness, innovation, technology, and the participation of the private and non-profit sectors in enhancing children's safety, protection, quality of life and well-being.

Preventive interventions

The best interventions are those that focus on preventing harm to children before it happens. These interventions are proactive and corrective. They aim to modify behaviors by raising the awareness of parents and educating them, and preventing negative outcomes for children before being worsened by promoting safety, efficiency, quality, and early intervention.

1 Linking traffic violations related to child safety and child protection authorities

Any traffic violation involving a child (driving under the legal age, or a child under the age of seven sitting without using a safety seat and seat belt) will be referred to child protection authorities. These traffic violations are considered a warning of a negligent incident that requires alerting. Child protection systems in Britain, America and Norway, for example, require all police personnel to alert child protection specialists when they witness, during the performance of their duties, any danger to children. [69]

2 Maternity hospitals ensure that a child safety seat is available in the car before the newborn is discharged from the hospital.

These hospital requirements help raise awareness among mothers and fathers about the need to bring a suitable car seat for their newborn when receiving them from the hospital. Since 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics has required all hospitals to establish internal policies requiring the presence of a car infant seat before the baby can be discharged. [70] A number of non-profit organizations around the world, e.g. Buckle Up for Life and Baby2Baby, are actively recycling andproviding baby chairs to families in need through recycling and providing in-kind support to hospitals and low-income families. These organizations support the needs of infants and provide items such as child seats, and they are also active in educating parents about ways to protect their children while traveling in the car and choosing the appropriate seat.

69 **"A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect, and promote the welfare of children".** UK Government. 2023.

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70. "Safe transportation of newborns at hospital discharge"'" **American Academy of Pediatrics. Committee on Injury and Poison Prevention 1991**"

►

3 Requiring a professional examination for expatriate domestic workers specializing in childcare

Work visas will only be issued to expatriates working as childcare domestic workers if they meet minimum educational requirements. For example, Canadian immigration policies require immigrants working in home care to have a high school equivalent, a minimum level of childcare experience, and a minimum level of approved skills training. [71] As part of its labor market strategy, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development seeks to raise the level of skills and talents in the Saudi economy through initiatives aimed at reforming employment, recruitment, and skills systems. These initiatives include the Professional Examination Initiative and the Professional Accreditation Program, which verify the qualifications and skills of all categories of foreign workers. However, these initiatives currently do not include domestic workers.

4 Early warning systems to detect school absenteeism and drop-out

The United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and other OECD countries are developing automated digital systems that monitor children who are frequently absent from school and encourage early intervention by correcting the child's progress and checking on their family, social and economic stability, before the problem worsens with school drop-out or escalates to catastrophic risks in their youth or a threat to their protection. [72] Student attendance is monitored through the Noor system in Saudi schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. However, it remains unclear whether there are procedures for escalating the issue to family protection centers or other measures for correcting the child's progress, ensuring their right to education is fully fulfilled without interruption, and addressing any family or social issues that may be hindering their academic achievement.

5 Community awareness campaigns on childhood

Government and non-profit organizations around the world are actively spreading awareness messages through continuous digital and in-person campaigns on key childhood issues, such as encouraging breastfeeding (World Breastfeeding Week in August), encouraging newborn screening to reduce disability (Newborn Screening Awareness Month in September), children's rights (World Children's Day on November 20), and child safety in the digital world (Safer Internet Day in February). There are also various campaigns to spread effective parenthood skills, positive parenting, proper nutrition for children, and awareness of family counseling services available in government and non-profit organizations. International organizations, governmental bodies, and non-profit organizations often actively broadcast these messages throughout the year to raise community awareness about pressing childhood issues.

71. "Immigrant Worker Requirements in Canadian Immigration and Labour Policies." Government of Canada Immigration Services. 2024.

➤

72. Effective outreach to young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs): "Experience from the ground, European Commission 2018

➤

Skill interventions

Not every adult necessarily possesses family planning, childbirth, and parenthood skills, as these are not acquired simply by marriage. Many skills related to marital relations, pregnancy, nutrition, healthcare, and child development require learning from specialists. Getting married or having and raising children without prior skills is an uncalculated risk, like driving without prior instruction. Because leading a married life and parenthood is more complex and more affecting people's lives and futures.

Therefore, government and non-profit organizations are actively providing diverse educational and cultural content to equip community members with these skills. Such as pre-marriage courses, prenatal education courses, parenthood training courses, and divorce co-parenting classes to ensure that the child is not affected after the divorce.

1 Marriage and family planning skills

A study of the social return of the "Preparation for Marriage" project in 19 Saudi non-profit associations covering 9 regions around the Kingdom showed an increase in knowledge, skills, and family stability among trainees, compared to other projects. [73] The Family Affairs Council also offers the "Marital Life Leadership Program" digitally for those wishing to complete the training course remotely.

2 Natal skills

International practice confirms that parents who engage in prenatal education are more successful than those who enter the childbirth experience without prior skills training. With early awareness, the rate of natural birth, adherence to breastfeeding, and regular vaccinations increases, and parents become more confident in caring for their children. [74] In the Kingdom, the Child Care Association offers a similar program called "Breastfeeding Support" for assisting pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. [75]

3 Parenthood skills

The Triple P – Positive Parenting Program is implemented globally in more than 30 countries, and provides different levels of support according to family needs, ranging from guidance publications to individual sessions with specialists. [76] At the Kingdom level, the Child Care Society's Effective Parenting Program aims to provide parents with the skills necessary to raise children, which covered in its thirteenth iteration 13 regions in the Kingdom by the end of 2024.

73 **"Study of the Impact of Preparing Men and Women for Marriage."** Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, 2018.

▶

74. **Emily Hooper et al. "The effectiveness of antenatal education on improving labour and birth outcomes – A systematic review and meta-analysis."** Women and Birth Scientific Journal, 2025.

▶

75 **"Breastfeeding Support Program",** Childcare Association, 2025.

▶

76. **"The Triple P – Positive Parenting Program"**, a non-profit organization. 2025.

▶

4 Healthy separation skills for children

A 12-year study in the United States showed that "parent mediation" programs, which aim to foster a stable parenting environment after separation, increased the rate of parental contact with their children by 30% compared to families that did not participate in mediation programs, which had a 9% contact rate with their children. [77]

5 Family care skills for children with disabilities

Studies in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States have shown that the impact of training programs for families of children with intellectual disabilities has helped these families improve their caregiving skills and home environment, and reduced their sense of stress. [78]

While these skills cannot be imposed on everyone, it is possible to consider encouraging them, as other countries do, through the following:

A Fee waiver for obtaining a licensed course

In the United States, some health insurance companies offer fee waivers to encourage mothers to attend birth preparation program, such as exempting the fees for issuing insurance policy for a newborn. [79] Ten US states also offer a marriage license discount of up to $75 for couples who have completed the course, in exchange for attending 4-12 hours of training in marriage skills. According to academic research, these courses have reduced the divorce rate by between 0.5% and 1.5%, depending on the quality of implementation. It is estimated that these courses have reduced the number of divorce cases in the ten states by 25,000 divorces. [80]

B One-time assistance for marriage or a new child in exchange for obtaining a licensed course

In the United States, some retail companies have offered a bonus to the mother and doctor or full coverage for some newborn supplies to encourage mothers to attend birth preparation programs. [81]

C Requiring the completion of marriage for obtaining a licensed course

Premarital courses in Malaysia (mandatory) and Indonesia (voluntary) show general benefits, such as enhancing awareness of reproductive health, nutrition and preparedness for marriage. [82]

77. Kaila Eisenkraft. **"Guide for Parent Mediation Efficacy Programs",** University of Massachusetts Boston, 2019.

78. Tamara May and Katrina Harris. **"The effect of training courses for parents of children with intellectual disabilities."** Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2020.

79. **"Worksite Strategies to Improve Maternal and Infant Health: Experiences of US Employers."** ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety, 2011.

80. Tiffany Clyde. **"Master's Thesis: The Effects of Premarital Education Promotion Policies on U.S. Divorce Rates",** Brigham Young University, 2019.

81. **"Worksite Strategies to Improve Maternal and Infant Health: Experiences of US Employers."** ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety, 2011.

82. Kholis Bidayati et al. **"Strengthening Family Institution through Pre-Marital Course: Comparative Study between Indonesia and Malaysia"**. Al-Risalah (scientific periodical), 2020.

D Requiring obtaining a licensed course before the completion of the divorce if there are children

17 states in the United States require all separated parents to attend a virtual course aimed at educating parents on how to deal with their children and prepare them psychologically for the new life ahead. Children whose parents attended this course showed reduced psychological distress, higher self-esteem, and academic achievement, compared to children whose parents did not attend the course. The judge may suspend the divorce proceedings if both parents do not fully attend the course. [83]

Educational interventions

The Kingdom's Vision 2030 focuses on strengthening the family's role in their children's educational journey. The "Vibrant Society" theme of the Vision document stipulates a commitment to "deepen the participation of parents in the education process, to help them develop their children's characters and talents so that they can contribute fully to society." The Human Capacity Development Program is one of the fundamental pillars for achieving this ambition, as the goal of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 is: "To enhance family participation in preparing for the futures of their children" is one of the program's strategic objectives.

Child development is not limited to adequate nutrition and good healthcare. Rather, a child's personality, expressive abilities, and behaviors are shaped in the first 1,000 days of their life. This has led international experts to pause and reflect on the current bias in the education community that skills should only be taught to adolescents and young adults. Meanwhile, evidence indicates the importance of acquiring skills from an early age in childhood, especially life skills. Learning today is not limited to early childhood education facilities, but includes informal education, whether digitally, at home, or in the community. Today's "life skills" include a wide range of skills that must be instilled early in childhood, such as creativity, empathy, self-management, resilience, and communication. [84]

International experts encourage a focus on a set of essential skills, known as "21st century skills," including life skills, digital literacy, environmental education, arts, culture and sports, as well as risk awareness and ways to protect oneself from health threats, emergencies, disasters, assaults, fraud and misuse, both in the digital world and in people's lives. The skills we instill in children at an early age also protect them from future negative influences when they are exposed to negative content in the media, online, or from peer pressure. When we instill in children a concern for healthy eating and a keen interest in tracking nutritional value rather than calories, we reduce the risk of them falling into eating disorders and gaming disorders. One example of this is the Life is a Skill Guide issued by the Family Affairs Council. It is an interactive, applied guide directed at parents to help them develop life skills in their children from the age of seven to the age of eighteen by providing a set of methods, information, and guidance based on scientific experiments and the opinions of a wide group of experts and specialists in children's development and learning of skills. [85]

These practices also emphasize the need for channels to effectively activate family participation in instilling values and skills and educating children on correct behaviors—not necessarily participation in solving cognitive tasks, such as mathematics and science, but rather skill-based tasks, such as digital skills, safety skills and other life skills—through:

83. Emily H. Becher et al. **"Divorce and Predictors of Child Outcomes: The Impact of Divorce Education, Parenting, Co-parenting, and Adult Quality of Life".** Family Science Review Journal, 2022.

84. **"Reimagining Life Skills and Citizenship Education in the Middle East and North Africa – A Four-Dimensional and Systems Approach to 21st Century Skills."** UNICEF MENA Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) Initiative, 2017.

85. **"Life is a Skill Guide".** Family Affairs Council, 2024.

1 Participatory Curricula Between Schools and Families

These curricula are applied by a group of countries (such as Finland, Sweden, the USA, Canada, Portugal, and Norway), where parents and the local community participate in designing the curriculum, classroom and home activities. For example, in the USA, the "Learning in Places" approach has been implemented, which is an educational model that integrates family and community participation in curriculum design, especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.[86] (STEM). In Finland, parents are encouraged to actively participate in classroom activities. They are considered partners in the educational process and are expected to collaborate with teachers in designing curricula and supporting children's learning. [87] It is worth noting that family involvement in the educational process improves the school and home climate, reduces behavioral problems among students, and lowers school drop-out rates, which contributes to improving the quality of education. [88]

2 Parents' Committees for Student Activities

It is an essential part of promoting community and educational participation in many countries around the world, such as the USA, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Australia, parents are encouraged to participate in school activities through committees that organize sporting events, cultural activities, and educational trips. In Finland, some schools involve parents in decision-making committees, ensuring they have a say in educational policies and decisions. [89] Research has shown that the presence of active parent committees increases students' motivation to participate in academic and extracurricular activities, which enhances their ability to develop their social and leadership skills. [90]

3 Family Partnership Model

It is a British framework used in the United Kingdom and Australia within kindergartens, health centers, and early intervention programs. It trains practitioners to build a cooperative and equal relationship with parents, through active listening skills, empathy, and respect for family privacy, with the aim of enabling them to support their children's growth and well-being. Studies indicate that it enhances the quality of the relationship between parents and practitioners, and increases parental involvement in the education and support process, especially for families facing long-term challenges. [91]

86. "Learning in Places". A non-profit cooperative initiative in Washington. 2025.

87. Miina Orell and Päivi Pihlaja "Cooperation between Home and School in the Finnish Core Curriculum 2014" Nordic Studies in Education, 2020.

88. Sónia Caridade et al. The Mediating Effect of Parental Involvement on School Climate and Behavior Problems: School Personnel Perceptions Behavioral Sciences Council, 2020.

89. Parent Involvement in Finnish Education: "A Key Ingredient" Finland Education Hub, 2023.

90. Kelemu Zelalem Berhanu and Parvathy Naidoo. The relationship between parent-teacher-student association (PTSA) involvement in school and academic achievement as mediated by learning engagement in the case of primary schools Social Sciences & Humanities Journal, 2024.

91. "Family Partnership Model". Centre for Parent and Child Support, 2025.

4 Safe Technology Use Program

It is a collaborative educational approach to digital safety for children. Many awareness programs have been designed to protect children from digital dangers, such as the "Staying Safe from Online Harm" program developed by Childhelp, which aims to teach children how to recognize digital threats such as online grooming and sexual extortion. These programs have achieved positive results. Studies have shown that children who participated in these programs became better able to deal with digital risks and reduce exposure to threats. [92]

The International Cybersecurity Forum Foundation's report, "Why Children Feel Unsafe in Cyberspace," revealed that 72% of children under 12 on social media have experienced a cyber threat, and 48% of them feel unsafe. To address global challenges and create a safer and more stable cyberspace for children, His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince - may Allah protect him - launched the global initiative: "Child Protection in Cyberspace". The initiative includes 5 strategic objectives, which are: Enhancing cooperation, raising awareness of the importance of child protection, developing cybersecurity skills, enhancing global response, and promoting knowledge exchange—these strategic objectives and their supporting projects contribute to creating a safe cyberspace for children. " [93]

5 Anti-Bullying Programs

Such as the Norwegian-originated OBPP program, which has been implemented in several countries around the world (Iceland, Sweden, Lithuania, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Canada, and has been applied in thousands of schools in the USA). [94] According to a review of more than 100 studies, the program's global results showed that it reduced bullying by approximately 26%, the highest rate among all the other reviewed programs, and contributed to reducing bullying against victims by 12-15%. [95]

6 Behavior Correction Interventions for At-Risk Students

Through cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). It is considered an effective, science-based intervention for addressing a variety of behavioral and psychological challenges among at-risk students. Studies show that CBT helps improve understanding and awareness, reduce aggressive behaviors, enhance coping skills, and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Therefore, it is recommended that CBT programs be implemented in schools as part of early and comprehensive intervention strategies to support student well-being.

Most interventions used to treat digital addiction in children and adolescents have been CBT or CBT-based interventions, and have proven effective in improving symptoms of anxiety and depression associated with digital addiction. Also, rather than directly targeting addictive behaviors, some family interventions seek to strengthen family functions and relationships within it, which indirectly contributes to reducing addiction. [96]

92 Staying Safe from Online Harm Childhelp, 2025.

93 "Child Protection in Cyberspace (CPC) Global Cybersecurity Forum, 2025.

94 "Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)". Clemson Program. 2025.

95. Hannah Gaffney et al.. **"Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying perpetration and victimization: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis".** Campbell Systematic Reviews, 2021.

96. Keya Ding and Hui Li. "**Digital Addiction Intervention for Children and Adolescents: A Scoping Review."** International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2023.

As for substance addiction, the Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM) is considered the most successful model for preventing substance use by modifying the social environment surrounding young people, to reduce the likelihood of starting to use substances. This includes strengthening social and environmental protective factors and reducing risk factors. This approach considers that "society is the patient," and aims to modify the social, organizational, and cultural characteristics of society. [97] Reykjavik Municipality oversees recreational activities that promote safety and psychological well-being. It aims to develop children's and adolescents' self-image, enhance their social skills, and foster feelings of caring, engagement and participation. These activities also include prevention, education, and entertainment aspects, such as after-school programs, youth centers, and recreation centers. [98]

Evidence also suggests that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) programs are an effective approach to reducing youth involvement in criminal activities. In contrast, strategies that focus on media campaigns to deter crime and violence show ineffective results and may even increase involvement in criminal activities. [99]

In addition, the family and school are not sufficient to contain children's behavior; rather, broader community participation is required from the people of local communities. The practice of "Communities That Care" (CTC) program highlights a global, science-based community prevention system designed to reduce risks, enhance protection, and prevent health and behavioral problems in adolescents across the community. Studies have shown that rates of teen smoking, delinquent behaviors, and violence were significantly lower in communities that implemented the CTC program compared to communities that did not. [100]

Some early detected disorders can be corrected when intervention is provided by training the parents themselves on how to contain and correct their children's behavior using positive educational methods. International studies indicate the successful impact of parent-based programs in treating children's violent or disturbing behavior. [101]

7 Notifying the School of Children Changes Following the Divorce

In Denmark, the Parental Responsibility Act requires parents to inform the Family Affairs Agency of any changes in custody arrangements. Parents must also provide the school with formal notice including details of the custody and who has the right to receive the child. [102] In Norway, the Children and Parents Act stipulates that the court must notify the municipal child welfare services and the county governor in certain cases, such as when no one appears in court, or if a ruling results in no one having parental responsibility for the child. [103]

97. Alfgeir L. Kristjansson et al. "Development and Guiding Principles of the Icelandic Model for Preventing Adolescent Substance Use." Health Promotion Practice Journal. 2020.

98. "Recreational Activities" City of Reykjavík, Island Capital. 2025.

99. Evidence Wrap-up: What are the most promising strategies for reducing violence and building peace? J-PAL. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

100. Sabrina Oesterle et al. "Variation in the Sustained Effects of the Communities That Care Prevention System on Adolescent Smoking, Delinquency, and Violence" Prevention Science Journal. 2014.

101. Tanja Mingebach et al.. "Meta-meta-analysis on the effectiveness of parent-based interventions for the treatment of child externalizing behavior problems" PLOS. 2018.

102. Kristian Sandberg. "Shared parenting and father involvement after divorce in Denmark" National Library of Medicine. 2023.

103. "Act relating to Children and Parents (the Children Act)" Norwegian Government. 2017.

8 — Employing sufficient numbers of special education teachers and support positions, such as shadow teachers in disability education settings

In Australia, the Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) program provides specialized training for kindergarten teachers to work with children with disabilities and complex medical needs, enabling them to deliver inclusive education programs that respond to the needs of all children. [104] Danish schools require students to take mandatory assessments in core subjects throughout their school career. This means that teachers can know each student's condition and characteristics, which enables them to realize the need for differentiated education or perhaps special education. [105] In Finland, quality early childhood education and care are a right for every child. Therefore, all children, regardless of their needs, have the opportunity to participate in early education and care. Only children with greater learning needs are taught in separate classes or schools. [106] Students with mild disabilities, such as dyslexia in Singapore, often receive special education services within regular primary schools. These schools typically employ at least one learning support coordinator to teach reading and math skills, as well as a specialist teacher who provides personalized instruction. [107] The Irish Minister for Education recently asked the Education Council to require all teaching students to complete an assessed practical training period in a special needs education setting, accompanied by supportive study modules. In general, it is recommended that individual educational plans be developed for each student with a disability (Individualized Education Program. [108] Based on this program, the number of practitioners required in parallel with the subject teacher is determined to empower students with disabilities, such as the presence of at least one assistant special education teacher in the classrooms using the co-teaching approach between the subject teacher, the special education teacher, and their support positions, such as shadow teachers. These ratios reach 12:1:1, with one special education teacher and one support staff member for every 12 students with disabilities. [109]

The Finnish Government also introduced a new 3-tiered support model (general, intensive, or special) aimed at strengthening students' right to early intervention and encouraging schools to experiment with alternative support methods before transferring students to specialized services. Co-teaching is encouraged as part of the national model, with the classroom teacher and special education teacher working together in the same classroom. This system also supports the involvement of multidisciplinary teams including: The primary teacher, special education teacher, student counselor, and psychologist or social worker all work together to design and implement support plans based on the student's need and not just the medical diagnosis. In Slovenia, special schools have become hubs for mobile special educators who work part-time in inclusive schools to provide individual support to students, as well as mentoring teachers and participating in the development of individual education plans.

104. "Helping children in need of custody support". Victoria State Government, Australia. 2025.

105. "Country information for Denmark - Systems of support and specialist provision" European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. 2025.

106. "Finland's Approach to Special Needs & Inclusion". HEI Schools. 2022.

107. Jugnu Agrawal et al. International Policies, Identification, and Services for Students With Learning Disabilities: An Exploration Across 10 Countries Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal. 2019. 2025.

108. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), United Federation of Teachers in New York. 2025.

109. "Special class staffing ratios". United Federation of Teachers in New York. 2025.

In the Netherlands, there are what are known as school coaches who work within the school to support teachers in teaching students with disabilities. If the school coach is not sufficiently specialized, external experts from special education institutions are brought in to work directly with the teacher to support classroom practices, modify instructional strategies, and develop the teacher's skills in dealing with difficult cases, such as ADHD or behavioral challenges. The Irish model explores how specialists, such as speech and language pathologists and occupational therapists, can be integrated as part of the school staff, working with the entire class or school environment, rather than being limited to individual work with just one student. In Portugal, most private schools have become resource centers for inclusion, with their staff working within public schools to facilitate students' access to education. The technical staff includes: Psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, and other professionals can work directly with students in the classroom, either individually or in small groups, or provide advice and guidance to teaching staff and parents/caregivers. Under the policy approved by the Ministry of Education, resource centers enter into partnership agreements with schools and operate within one or more schools within their geographic area. This policy has enabled the integration of almost all children (at least 98.8%) into 50 public educational settings. The legal framework in Portugal promotes a social student-centred approach to the educational process. [110]

110. Justina Žutautaitė, Fabio Belafatti, Elma Paulauskaitė.**Transition from Special Education to Inclusive Education Systems,** European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities, 2023.

Spatial interventions

To ensure that children and families live in suitable and child-friendly cities and facilities, governments and local administrations are actively designing urban interventions that ensure public spaces and urban plans are aligned with the needs of children, fathers, mothers, and families.

1   Using technology to protect children in high-risk environments

Some schools are adopting innovative technological and design solutions to protect students in restrooms, including smart motion and sound sensors that detect smoking—especially e-cigarettes—violence, or abnormal gatherings without recording sound or image (such as[111] HALO, FlySense, and Avgilon systems), and a secure architectural design (CPTED) that enhances natural surveillance and reduces crime by up to 80% when implemented in schools through redesigning entrances, facilities, and access control points using these principles. [112] In another study compiled from 4,717 students across 50 middle schools, these security solutions helped reduce the likelihood of student absence due to security concerns by about 35-70%, increased their sense of security in waiting areas and parking lots, and significantly reduced their sense of danger.[113] In addition, emergency distress and panic button solutions integrated into rapid response systems enable immediate intervention in case of danger, combining the preservation of privacy with enhanced security.

2   Activating community neighborhood centers in the heart of every residential district

As in the models of Madinah, Jeddah, and Asir. They are established within the urban fabric of residential areas as community interaction points that provide recreational, sports, educational, health, cultural activities, and public services to the residents of the neighborhood. Neighborhood centers have proven their effectiveness globally, such as the Neighborhood Centers Together in San Francisco, which serve more than 10,000 individuals annually,[114] by improving community security indicators, enhancing community integration, and reducing social isolation. Also, Toronto Neighbourhood Centres, as a network of multi-service centers operating in Toronto neighborhoods since 1998, have proven effective in promoting social cohesion. Some large centers, such as the West Neighbourhood House, serves more than 16,000 people annually, reflecting their role as a key driver of integration and community engagement. [115] Further, the Berlin Neighbourhood Management Programme, a comprehensive German initiative in the city of Berlin that started in many neighborhoods and reached 465,500 residents in 34 neighborhoods within 8 municipalities, focused on social integration and improving educational opportunities, and contributed to motivating residents to participate in local projects.[116]. Similar initiatives, such as "Regenerating Urban Neighbourhoods" in the cities of Berlin, Manchester, Paris, Brussels, Zurich, etc., focused on regenerating deteriorating urban areas through local community-connected centers and multi-level management methods. According to a study on the impact of this type of intervention on crime in cities, Glasgow (Scotland) achieved a 36% reduction in crime in the treated areas, which is equivalent to approximately 15 fewer criminal acts per year per intervention site. [117]

111. Bennet M. B. **E. "School Bathroom Safety."** United Educators. 2025.

112. Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS). **"How Environmental Design Protects Your Students and Staff."** 2022.

113. Vagi K. J. et al. **"Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Characteristics Associated With Violence and Safety in Middle Schools."** Journal of School Health. 2018.

114. **"The Impact of Neighborhood Centers Together Programs".** San Francisco, USA. 2025.

115. **"Enabling Personal and Social Change."** Toronto West Neighborhood House Annual Report. 2025.

116. **"Berlin Neighbourhood Management programme",** European Commission. 2022.

117. Borbely D., and Rossi G. **"Urban regeneration projects and crime: evidence from Glasgow."** Journal of Economic Geography. 2023.

3   Creating family-friendly work environments

These are initiatives aimed at equipping workplaces with facilities dedicated to mothers, such as equipped breastfeeding rooms, rest areas, and policies that support maternity and paternity leave. Among these initiatives is the "Parent-Friendly Label (PFL)" program in Abu Dhabi, which is awarded as an accreditation to institutions that implement policies such as parental leave and flexible work arrangements. It benefits more than 163,000 employees, including 105,000 working parents, ultimately affecting children aged 0-8 years. [118] In the United States, a national study showed that workplaces providing high-quality breastfeeding rooms increase breastfeeding rates by 2.3% and improve employee satisfaction by 25%.[119] In Australia, a workplace breastfeeding support initiative helped raise the postpartum return-to-work rate from 64% to 79% within a year. [120] UNICEF reports also confirm that family-friendly policies directly contribute to supporting the work environment for female employees, promoting children's health, and increasing breastfeeding rates. [121]

4   Expanding the scope of community health in local health clusters

Municipal health services centers in Denmark and the Netherlands integrate with schools within the same municipality to implement the case management concept for children's services (in Denmark for children with disabilities, [122] and in the Netherlands for children absent from school for a period exceeding the standard duration without a medical excuse), which led to reducing the period of absence from 3.9% to 2.5% within 3 months. [123]
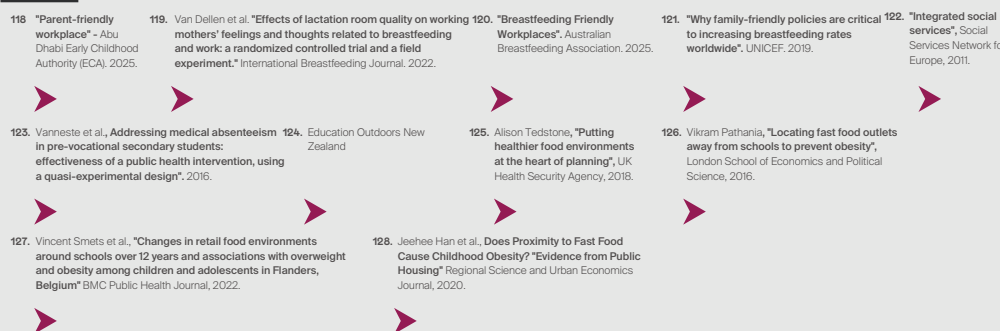
5   Local rural summer camps

Finland and New Zealand implement rural summer camp programs that integrate education with environmental and agricultural activities. Nature-based educational programs, such as "school forests", show a tangible improvement in children's social skills and critical thinking, and have reduced rates of social isolation. In New Zealand, camps have integrated environmental activities into curricula, which has strengthened social bonds and reduced isolation among participants. [124]

6   Prohibiting the sale of unhealthy products in stores located near schools

Countries such as South Korea, Brazil, the United Kingdom [125]and Ireland have implemented restrictions on fast food outlets near schools, as evidence has shown that proximity to such outlets – within a quarter of a mile – has led to a 5.2% increase in the prevalence of obesity among high school students in the United States. [127.126] Studies have shown that proximity to fast-food restaurants increases childhood obesity - for example, in New York City, every 0.1 mile closer to a fast-food restaurant raises the prevalence of obesity by up to 1.7% among students in grades 3 to 8; similarly, a nationwide Swedish study found that living in neighborhoods with fast-food restaurants increases the likelihood of childhood obesity by 14%. [128]

118. "Parent-friendly workplace" – Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority (ECA). 2025.

119. Van Dellen et al. "Effects of lactation room quality on working mothers' feelings and thoughts related to breastfeeding and work: a randomized controlled trial and a field experiment." International Breastfeeding Journal. 2022.

120. "Breastfeeding Friendly Workplaces". Australian Breastfeeding Association. 2025.

121. "Why family-friendly policies are critical to increasing breastfeeding rates worldwide". UNICEF. 2019.

122. "Integrated social services", Social Services Network for Europe, 2011.

123. Vanneste et al., Addressing medical absenteeism in pre-vocational secondary students: effectiveness of a public health intervention, using a quasi-experimental design". 2016.

124. Education Outdoors New Zealand

125. Alison Tedstone, "Putting healthier food environments at the heart of planning", UK Health Security Agency, 2018.

126. Vikram Pathania, "Locating fast food outlets away from schools to prevent obesity", London School of Economics and Political Science, 2016.

127. Vincent Smets et al., "Changes in retail food environments around schools over 12 years and associations with overweight and obesity among children and adolescents in Flanders, Belgium" BMC Public Health Journal, 2022.

128. Jeehee Han et al., Does Proximity to Fast Food Cause Childhood Obesity? "Evidence from Public Housing" Regional Science and Urban Economics Journal, 2020.

7 Conditional vocational training for workers in professions that are related to child protection

Many countries and international organizations adopt mandatory vocational education programs for workers in professions that are related to child protection systems. In the Commonwealth countries, 15 countries require the imposition of training and education, and obliging workers to report cases of child abuse, while some countries limit this obligation to specific professional groups. [129] Similarly, mandatory reporting programs for teachers and doctors in the European Union and Australia require annual accredited training.[130] The international Keeping Children Safe standards also mandate policies and comprehensive training for all staff and volunteers.[131] One of the most prominent initiatives of non-governmental organizations is the Darkness to Light program, which aims to prevent sexual abuse of children by training workers to be key figures responsible for protection and early intervention. [132]

129. **"Framework Requirement: Training and compliance"** Australian Government –National Office for Child Safety. 2025.

130. **"Child protection training"** NSW Government, Australia. 2025.

131 Pinheiro, P. B. **The International Child Safeguarding Standards...and how to implement them In: Keeping Children Safe Organization –** European Commission. 2025.

132. Darkness to Light Organization

Legislative interventions

With the resurgence of risks and digital changes in the world, international experts are observing the need to continuously update the legislative environment to keep pace with the protection and development of children in the face of emerging threats, which include:

1 **Criminalizing the grooming and enticement of children through digital space**

These crimes have emerged with the increased use of the Internet, social media, and digital games by children. This usually begins with the formation of a friendship and close relationship between the perpetrator and the child, in which the perpetrator continues to gain the child's trust and build an emotional relationship to lure them further for sexual purposes. Several countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, and New Zealand, have criminalized child grooming through precise criminal descriptions that do not allow the accused to evade the charges by claiming imagination or that nothing was done. The Netherlands imposes a prison sentence of up to two years or a fine on anyone who "arranges a meeting" with a child whom they know to be a child, or who can reasonably be assumed to be a child based on the context, with the intention of harming this child. In New Zealand, it is a crime to "attempt to meet children after digital sexual grooming" and the penalty is up to 7 years in prison, [133] and this penalty is up 10 years in the United Kingdom. [134] In 2023, Japan also issued a new penal code that criminalizes child grooming.

2 **Requiring digital content platforms to accurately verify a child's age to protect them from exposure to inappropriate content.**

This year has witnessed the implementation of strict new laws in the United Kingdom (from July 2025), Australia (from December 2025) [135] and the United States (some states such as New York and Tennessee) requiring online platforms to verify the age of users or obtain parental consent to protect minors from inappropriate content. According to the UK's Online Safety Act 2023, platforms that allow content unsuitable for children (such as pornography or content that encourages eating disorders, self-harm, or suicide) must use "highly effective" age verification before enabling access. In case of breaching the said obligation, a regulatory body may impose fines of up to £18 million or 10% of global revenue, whichever is greater, and the penalty may extend to suspending the service or taking legal action against executives. [136]

3 **Restricting access to platforms that pose a high risk to children**

Some countries have moved to block and restrict access to Roblox and TikTok platforms specifically because of the increasing risks of harmful content to children on them. Turkey, Qatar, Oman, and the UAE have restricted Roblox and limited access to social media platforms for children under 16.

133. Dutch Criminal Law

134. Sexual Offences Act in UK

135. "Social media age restrictions." The Australian Government eSafety Commissioner. 2025.

136. "Online Safety Act: explainer". UK Government. 2025.

Health interventions

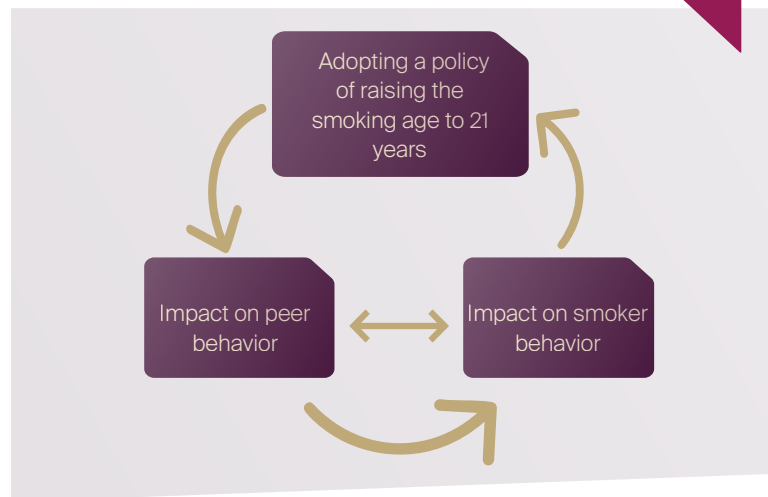### 1 Addressing the epidemic of smoking among children and adolescents [137]

International experts have noted an alarming increase in the use of e-cigarette products by children, reaching three times the rate in the United Kingdom and double in Canada among teenagers, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). [138] WHO provided a technical summary of the most prominent threats to childhood and health resulting from the emergence of electronic cigarettes, especially the spread of thousands of artificial flavors that attract children and young people, and single-use electronic cigarettes. [139] Countries have taken the initiative to address the threat of widespread smoking through several policies, including:

A. Raising the legal age from 18 to 21 years

Such as the United States, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Kuwait. [140] Impact measurement studies have shown that the policy of raising the smoking age from 18 to 21 years leads to a real reduction in smoking rates among young people aged 18-20 by 39%, but the effect is doubled among those whose peers were smoking at the age of 16, reaching a higher reduction rate of 46%. The positive impact on young people increases due to curbing peer pressure and multiplying the social impact of policy, which is consistent with the social multiplier effect theory. This policy predictably and dynamically succeeds in significantly reducing the likelihood of smoking among children. [141]

It helps reduce children's exposure to peer pressure and the risk of smoking, because it reduces smoking among their older friends. Studies indicate that peer pressure in Saudi Arabia is the main reason, in addition to parental neglect, for the spread of smoking among children. [142] This is confirmed by the qualitative research of this report, which shows that children obtain tobacco through older friends; for example, through classmates at the end of high school who can buy tobacco for their younger peers under the policy of allowing the sale of products to persons at the age of 18.

Adopting a policy of raising the smoking age to 21 years → Impact on smoker behavior ↔ Impact on peer behavior

Next Generation of Saudis
Childhood in Saudi Arabia

137. "Congressional Testimony of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner". FDA. 2021.

138. Urgent action needed to protect children and prevent the uptake of e-cigarettes. 2023.

139. Technical note on call to action on electronic cigarettes. World Health Organization (WHO). 2023.

140. Des W. Cox et al. "Statement on Tobacco 21 from the European Respiratory Society Tobacco Control Committee". European Respiratory Journal. 2023.

141. Abigail Friedman et at.. "Tobacco-21 laws and young adult smoking: quasi-experimental evidence." 2020.

142. Ibrahim Alasqah et al. "A systematic review of the prevalence and risk factors of smoking among Saudi adolescents". Saudi Medical Journal. 2019.

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B **Ban on flavored e-cigarettes**

Countries such as Australia, China and the United States have imposed a ban on flavored e-cigarettes targeting children's tastes – limiting e-cigarettes offered for sale to tobacco and mint flavors only – to reduce their appeal among children. [143]

C **Ban on single-use e-cigarettes**

The United Kingdom, Belgium, France, and Australia have implemented bans on single-use electronic cigarettes to limit their use among young people and reduce environmentally harmful waste. [144]

D **Banning the sale, shipping and delivery of tobacco products through online stores and delivery applications.**

Many countries, including China, Belgium and France, have implemented strict rules or bans on the sale and delivery of e-cigarettes online to prevent young people from accessing them and to limit minors' access to tobacco products. [145]

3 **Amending the Excise Tax Law by gradually increasing the tax rate according to the sugar, salt, or harmful fat content.**

This amendment is intended to encourage companies to reformulate products to obtain an incentive tax benefit that matches the health benefit to society from reducing the concentration of harmful substances. The United Arab Emirates recently amended the excise tax by applying a graduated tax based on sugar content using a "graded volumetric model" that links the value of the tax imposed on each liter of sweetened beverages to the amount of sugar. [146] Many countries, such as the United Kingdom and South Africa, have also switched to tiered taxes based on sugar content to reduce consumption and encourage product reformulation by manufacturers, which are appropriate recommendations for the Saudi context, according to international experts. [147]

4 **Fortifying more staple foods with minerals and vitamins to address micronutrient deficiencies in the community**

A number of countries – including Saudi Arabia – are implementing programs to fortify foods, such as wheat with iron and folic acid, to reduce the risk of anemia and birth defects. As a result, birth defect rates decrease by up to 78% after reinforcement. [148] The Kingdom has adopted measures and programs to fortify food to combat micronutrient deficiencies, such as iodizing salt.[149] Milk is fortified with vitamin (A) and vitamin (D), and wheat flour is fortified with iron and five types of vitamins and minerals, including folic acid and vitamin (D). [150] These successes in the Kingdom can be built upon by expanding the scope of targeted main foods fortification to include rice with essential minerals and vitamins such as iron (as it is a common component in meals consumed in the Kingdom), in accordance with the WHO recommendation based on the success of rice fortification policies. [151]

143. The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. **"Changes to the regulation of vapes"** Australian Government. 2024.

144. Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, **"Government crackdown on single-use vapes",** UK Government, 2024.

145. Belgium service public federal team,**"Guide for the trade of electronic cigarettes and e-liquids"**, Belgium Ministry of Public Health, 2023.

146. **"Amendments to Excise Tax on Sugar Sweetened Beverages"** UAE Ministry of Finance. 2025.

147. **"Health Taxation in Saudi Arabia: Policy Brief"**. United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organization. 2024.

148. Krista Crider et al.**Folic Acid and the Prevention of Birth Defects: 30 Years of Opportunity and Controversies"**. 2023. Annual Nutrition Review Journal.

149. Ayoub Al-Jawaldeh and Alexa Meyer, **"Chapter 3.6: Food Fortification, Including Biofortification"**, 9 January 2023.

150. Ayoub Al Jawaldeh, **The Regional assessment of the implementation of wheat flour fortification in the Eastern Mediterranean Region**, International Journal of Scientific Research and Management (IJSRM), 12 March 2019.

151. **"Guideline: fortification of rice with vitamins and minerals as a public health strategy"**. World Health Organization (WHO) 2018.

5   Expanding on essential health functions for child lives

While international experiences indicate the need for skills, services, and infrastructure to provide them with the full range of pediatric and adolescent health specialties, children also need additional psychological and social support, more so than other adult patients. Therefore, international experiences recommend the need to encourage the jobs of child life specialists who specialize in providing moral and cognitive support and contribute to responding to the developmental, emotional, psychological, and social needs of sick children in the hospital, accompanying them and helping them to understand the medical terms, procedures, and interventions that they will go through smoothly and naturally. Child life specialists help support the child and enable the doctor to work efficiently and productively. International and Saudi experts indicate that having a child life specialist reduces hospital costs (such as anesthesia and MRI procedures) and reduces the child's hospital stay by 24% after surgeries. [152] These Saudi specialists practice their work in a limited number of Saudi hospitals and with a small number of specialists. Children exposed to violence also need specialized care from child abuse specialists.[153] (child abuse).

6   Healthcare providers' awareness of patient health rights

The World Medical Association (WMA) recommends that medical schools ensure they have a sufficient number of qualified faculty members to teach the subject of "profession ethics and patient rights" to guarantee the sustainability of the quality of these courses. [154] A systematic review of research on teaching "health profession ethics" subject reported that 73% of it demonstrated positive results in the knowledge, behavior, and adoption of correct attitudes among health practitioners. [155] Locally, the Faculty of Medicine at King Abdulaziz University introduced the "health empowerment and health rights" subject into the faculty's academic curriculum (the fourth-year "Medical Ethics", and the fifth-year "Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive rights"). The Saudi Commission for Health Specialties included this subject in its e-learning courses and uploaded it to its platforms. [156]
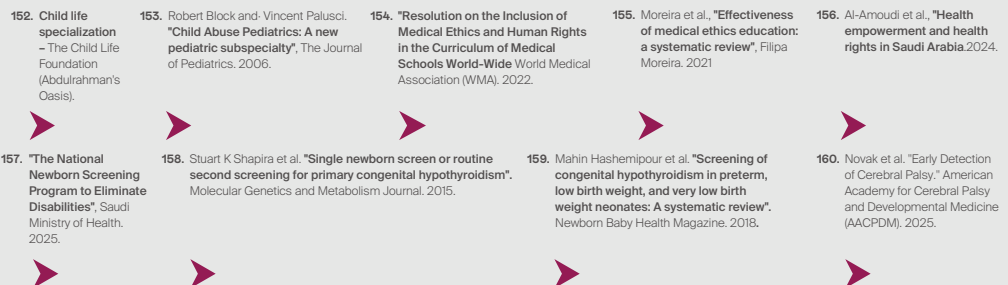
7   Programs for early detection of the causes of disability

A wide range of countries, including Saudi Arabia since 2005, have implemented comprehensive national newborn screening programs to reduce disability. [157] These programs have achieved remarkable success in the early detection of diseases and disabilities. However, international trials have yielded results suggesting that some disease indicators in high-risk newborns are immature due to their incomplete development, showing a false negative result for newborns who were actually ill. Therefore, some health systems repeat the examination a second time for all children, to ensure the accuracy of the detection; the second examination revealed 11.5% of the cases that were not detected in the first examination. [158] Symptoms are delayed in appearing among high-risk newborns (such as premature babies and babies with less than normal birth weight), which produces important benefits for disease detection when they are repeatedly screened up to 10 weeks of age. [159] There are also cases that are difficult to detect until several additional weeks have passed, but the likelihood of infection is high among high-risk newborns, such as those with cerebral palsy. Therefore, international literature recommends the need for intensive and accurate screening of high-risk newborns at 12 weeks of age to detect cases of infection among them early, and to take advantage of the window of early intervention for the greatest benefit that will positively impact the child's future. [160]

152. **Child life specialization** – The Child Life Foundation (Abdulrahman's Oasis).

153. Robert Block and· Vincent Palusci. **"Child Abuse Pediatrics: A new pediatric subspecialty"**, The Journal of Pediatrics. 2006.

154. **"Resolution on the Inclusion of Medical Ethics and Human Rights in the Curriculum of Medical Schools World-Wide** World Medical Association (WMA). 2022.

155. Moreira et al., **"Effectiveness of medical ethics education: a systematic review"**, Filipa Moreira. 2021

156. Al-Amoudi et al., **"Health empowerment and health rights in Saudi Arabia**.2024.

157. **"The National Newborn Screening Program to Eliminate Disabilities"**, Saudi Ministry of Health. 2025.

158. Stuart K Shapira et al. **"Single newborn screen or routine second screening for primary congenital hypothyroidism".** Molecular Genetics and Metabolism Journal. 2015.

159. Mahin Hashemipour et al. **"Screening of congenital hypothyroidism in preterm, low birth weight, and very low birth weight neonates: A systematic review".** Newborn Baby Health Magazine. 2018.

160. Novak et al. "Early Detection of Cerebral Palsy." American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine (AACPDM). 2025.

Financial interventions

As the number of births decreases, the number of insurance claims related to childbirth will decrease, and spending on childhood in the country's budget will gradually decrease, coinciding with an increase in the number of elderly people and the transfer of government allocations to meet other developmental needs. Given this decline in the number of births, it would be appropriate to utilize the available funding to improve the quality of spending on childhood without placing any additional burdens on insurance companies or the country's budget, by adding the following benefits to the policies of the Health Insurance Council and the Center for National Health Insurance (CNHI):

1. Expanding maternity and child benefits in medical insurance policies

To ensure coverage, quality, and access to maternal and child care services, we must ensure the availability of infrastructure, investments, and funding to sustain services and build capacity, talent and technologies. However, the high cost of investment prevents the availability of all services of the same quality and access to all residents. Therefore, countries aim, within the SDG framework, to achieve universal health coverage (UHC), which is the ability of every individual to access all health services of high quality when and where they need them, including awareness, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and care services at various stages of their life, without experiencing financial hardship. But preventing financial hardship remains a barrier for many in need of care. As health insurance services expand, experts recommend ensuring that reproductive, maternal, child, and disability health services are not excluded from coverage – whether those services are in-hospital, community-based (such as rehabilitation and social care services in the non-profit sector for people with disabilities), or home-based services. Saudi Arabia has achieved 75% comprehensive coverage of reproductive, maternal and child health services, according to the WHO estimates. [161] While international best practices recommend the inclusion of rehabilitation services,[162] (such as treatment in social care homes outside of hospitals), however, the updated basic health insurance policy issued by the Saudi Health Insurance Council explicitly states that no claim arising from "general physical health programs and treatment in social care homes" is covered. [163] The inclusion of funding for this type of service would enhance the wider availability of rehabilitation services in the health and non-profit sectors, within health facilities and in the community, and increase the wider availability of non-profit sector services for beneficiaries with disabilities. [164] In particular, the benefits of breastfeeding, as international practices recommend the inclusion of breastfeeding support services and products, such as lactation consultants and breast pumps. [165]

2. Financial facilities for families with children

As the burdens of care and living costs increase, the pressure on the budget of families with increasing children, some countries offer financial assistance to families who have their third child or more. The UAE and Hungary provide beneficiary families with facilities of discounting, suspending, and extending the repayment period for mortgage loans for families with more than two children, and Hungary offers additional tax incentives for these families. [166,167]

161. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Service Coverage sub-index on reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health

162. Fact sheets about Fertility - **Two versions.**

163. **"Final version of the Basic Health Insurance Policy "**– Saudi Council of Health Insurance. 2023.

164. **"Fact Sheets about Rehabilitation".** World Health Organization (WHO). 2025.

165. Women's Preventive Services Guidelines. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). 2025.

166. **"UAE Family Growth Program"**, Department of Community Development - Abu Dhabi.

167. Eva Fodor. **Getting paid to have children: Hungary's 'carefare' regime"** The European Consortium for Political Research. 2024.

Chapter 3

Recommen- dations

Recommendations

Based on all the above accounts of childhood experiences in the Kingdom, the diagnosis of the challenges facing children and their families, the review of the most effective solutions in other countries, and the opinions of workers and specialists in the field of childhood locally and internationally, the King Khalid Foundation presents the following recommendations to decision makers:

I:

Protecting children from the dangers of tobacco products through:

1. Raising the legal smoking age from the current 18 years to 21 years, by amending Paragraph (4) of Article (8) of the Anti-Smoking Law issued by Royal Decree No. M/56, dated 28/07/1436 AH.

2. Banning the sale of flavored e-cigarettes because they target children's tastes.

3. Banning the sale of single-use vapes to limit their circulation among children and reduce environmentally harmful waste.

4. Prohibiting the sale of tobacco products through digital stores and delivery applications, by amending the requirements issued by the Public Transport Authority, the Ministry of Municipalities and Housing, and the Ministry of Commerce.

5. Imposing strict measures to verify the age of the buyer of tobacco products in licensed stores by checking the date of birth in the national ID, residence permit or passport, or via official digital applications.

II:

Reducing childhood obesity rates and improving nutritional quality through:

1. Adding products with high sugar, salt, and fat content to the excise goods, and not limiting them to soft drinks, sweetened drinks, and energy drinks, by amending Article (2) of the Implementing Regulations of the Excise Goods Tax Law issued by the Board of Directors of Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority.

2. The excise tax rates shall be phased in according to the concentration of sugar, salt and fats in food products, to incentivize producers to reduce the levels of these substances to obtain better tax treatment commensurate with their reduction of harmful content by amending Article (3) of the Implementing Regulations of the Excise Goods Tax Law issued by the Board of Directors of Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority.

3. Expanding the fortification of staple foods with minerals and vitamins to respond to micronutrient deficiencies among children, by targeting the fortification of rice with essential minerals and vitamins, such as iron, as it is a common component in meals consumed in Saudi Arabia, building on the Kingdom's success in fortifying other commodities such as salt and wheat, and in accordance with the recommendation based on the success of rice fortification policies issued by the World Health Organization.

III:

Extending insurance coverage to include comprehensive access to reproductive, women's and children's health services, and products through:

1. Adding health education services for mothers and children, by covering the costs of "breastfeeding consultants" and "child life specialists" in the updated basic health insurance policy issued by the Saudi Health Insurance Council and the Center for National Health Insurance's benefits package.

2. Expanding the coverage of disability benefits to include health and social rehabilitation services outside of hospitals (at home and in specialized non-profit facilities), and ongoing disability needs, such as vitamins, consumables, and assistive and supplementary devices, within the updated basic health insurance policy issued by the Saudi Health Insurance Council and the Center for National Health Insurance's benefits package.

IV:

Intensify early detection and intervention to reduce disability among high-risk newborns by developing the National Newborn Screening Program to Eliminate Disabilities:

The inclusion of re-screening for high-risk newborns (such as premature babies, neonatal intensive care admissions, consanguineous births, complicated deliveries, and high-risk pregnancies) and adding other mandatory screenings for the early detection of cerebral palsy (CP), Developmental Dysplasia of the Hip (DDH), spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), and other disabling diseases that have a significant impact on children's disability in the Kingdom. Developing clinical action guidelines to improve early detection and intervention in cases of cerebral palsy.

V:

Encouraging high-priority medical specialties and skills for children's health through:

1. Expanding Saudi medical fellowship programs in the sub-specialties of adolescent medicine, adolescent psychiatry, and child abuse pediatrics.

2. The inclusion of the programs of "Child Life Specialists" and the "Breastfeeding Consultants" within the health academic programs of the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties.

3. Linking the renewal of the professional practice license issued by the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties to obtaining a certificate of completion of 'the health empowerment and health rights' course to ensure that medical personnel are qualified with skills in patient and child rights, patient empowerment and safety, and family support in containing and caring for the child.

4. Raising the upper age limit for pediatric clinical practice to 18 years.

VI:

Creating a friendly built environment in Saudi cities for families, mothers and children through:

1. Issuing a certificate for family-friendly work environments encourages the creation of a mother and child friendly work environment in private sector establishments, similar to the "Mowaamah" certificate for work environments suitable for people with disabilities, issued by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development.

2. Expanding the experience of neighborhood centers in Saudi cities, working to create family and child-friendly sports, cultural, recreational, and educational activities in city neighborhoods, based on the successes of neighborhood center associations in the regions of Madinah, Makkah and Aseer.

3. Activating the role of health clusters in promoting children's health within their geographical scope by focusing on intensifying the screening program in childcare centers and early childhood schools.

4. Expanding the scope of the Childcare Support "Qurrah" program of the Human Resources Development Fund to include both men and women with eligible wages.

VII:

Protecting children from the risk of abuse through:

Amending Article (1) of the Child Protection Law (issued by Royal Decree No. (M/14), dated 3/2/1436 AH, as amended by Royal Decree No. (M/72), dated 6/8/1443 AH, to include the criminalization of child grooming and online enticement.

VIII:

Disseminating marriage, childbirth, and parenting skills for married and divorced individuals, due to their pivotal impact on children's lives, through:

1. Obligating applicants for marriage loans at the Social Development Bank to complete accredited training hours for individuals who are about to get married.

2. Suspending the Social Development Bank's marriage loan repayments for one year for families during pregnancy, provided they complete accredited training hours in pregnancy, childbirth and newborn care skills.

3. Suspending the Social Development Bank's marriage loan repayments for one additional year for families when giving birth, provided they complete accredited training hours in parenting skills.

4. Obligating parents seeking divorce at the Personal Status Court to complete accredited training hours on healthy separation and shared parenting as a condition for finalizing divorce documentation procedures for separated families, after exhausting reconciliation sessions and determining custody and alimony.

IX:

Protecting children from inappropriate content in the digital space through:

1. Considering the appropriateness of studying the development of a legislative framework in cooperation between the General Authority for Media Regulation and the Communications, Space and Technology Commission (CST) to obligate social media and digital content platforms to protect children from content inappropriate for their age, by taking the responsibility for accurate age verification in a digital manner that ensures the preservation of privacy priorities and parental control to protect children from exposure to harmful content (such as indecent content and content that encourages addictive and self-harming behaviors). Financial penalties shall be imposed on digital platforms in the event that they are found to have failed to remove harmful content or verify age.

2. Considering the appropriateness of restricting access and studying the high rates of risk posed to children under 15 years old by social media and digital gaming platforms, due to increasing research and evidence of the disproportionate harmful content they have for children.

X:

Government platforms should be digitally integrated to focus on child safety and health through:

1. Activating digital integration between the Ministry of Education systems (e.g. Noor) and the Ministry of Justice systems (e.g Najiz) to verify interconnectivity and update the student's file with the personal status of their family, especially in cases of divorce or transfer of child custody.

2. Activating digital integration between the Ministry of Education systems (e.g. Noor) and the Ministry of Justice systems (e.g. Najiz) to verify interconnectivity and referrals between schools and hospitals, and update the student's file to ensure the school is aware of their health and psychological needs.

3. Activating digital integration between the Ministry of Education's systems (e.g. Noor) and the family protection systems of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, to verify interconnectivity and referrals between schools and the Domestic Violence Reporting and Child Protection Center, and to update the student's file in a way that ensures the school is aware of their social circumstances.

4. Activating digital integration between the General Directorate of Traffic's systems and the Family Protection systems at the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to verify interconnectivity and referrals between recurring traffic violations related to child safety and the Family Violence and Child Abuse Reporting Center, to help families understand the danger of neglecting traffic safety and help them be careful in protecting the child's interest.

May Allah lead us to success and prosperity,