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Global Child Health Is Local Child Health

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Global health, child health, climate change, food insecurity, infectious disease

In our increasingly interconnected world enveloped by the COVID-19 pandemic, we understand better than ever how global child health is the same as local child health. Pediatric nurses around the world are consistently working to improve the lives of children across the pediatric life span. Pediatric nurse practitioners (PNPs) and other advanced practice pediatric nurses (APRNs) are uniquely positioned to positively impact child health through clinical practice, service, research, and education. As members of the Global Health Special Interest Group within the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP), we recognize that local pediatric nurses often feel compelled to travel abroad to provide direct patient care and educational opportunities as they seek to reduce global pediatric health disparities. However, it is important to recognize that there are vulnerable children within the United States, many of whom often have similar health-related needs to those children living in lower-income countries. In other words, PNPs, other APRNs, and pediatric nurses do not need to travel far and

wide to engage in global health-related activities. Instead, they can improve global child health by working locally to reduce health inequities, deleterious effects of climate change, nutritional food insecurities, infectious diseases, and child trafficking—all of which impact child health right in our communities.

Health inequities negatively impact child health and well-being, which is no different in the global community. Therefore, pediatric and child health organizations (i.e., NAPNAP) must take explicit action to educate their members about these health inequalities and their underlying mechanisms with a specific emphasis on working toward enhancing child health across the life span. Inequalities can be corrected by supplementing professional training with education on how these disparities influence child health, disseminating information to key stakeholders (i.e., policy statements for local lawmakers), and promoting evidence-based practice interventions around child health inequalities (in the context of child rights). In addition, disparities can be reduced by working toward achieving feasible (i.e., accessible and affordable) high-quality pediatric care. To this extent, encourage research that assesses the effectiveness of equity-driven interventions and the ongoing state of these inequalities (Spencer, Raman, O'Hare, & Tamburlini, 2019). Therefore, future research around the facilitators and barriers to child health equity would support pediatric nurses in addressing barriers and promoting facilitators locally and globally.

As detailed in the recent special issue: “Planetary Health, Environmental Justice, and Child Health,” published in the *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, environmental climate change often holds deleterious effects on child health and well-being (Fuller, Cavanaugh, Green, & Duderstadt, 2022). Natural disasters and unusual weather patterns have a wide range of impacts on individuals, groups, and populations around the world. These effects include economic fallout and significant strains on health care systems (which degrade public health) and individual loss and injury (Uddin, Philipsborn, Smith, Mutic, & Thompson, 2021). Climate change also presents human rights challenges with migration and displacement disasters that profoundly affect child health. Specifically, air

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pollution and drastic temperature fluctuations increase the occurrence of child asthmatic and allergic complications while also being associated with negative outcomes during pregnancy (i.e., delayed development and harmful epigenetic modifications; [Harvard T.H. Chan, 2022](#)). Pediatric nurses are uniquely positioned to provide education to caregivers, families, and even local lawmakers on how climate change influences child health. Such education among key stakeholders is critical to developing new initiatives to enhance global child health from an environmental justice perspective ([Chesney & Duderstadt, 2022](#)). The efforts of PNPs and APRNs are critical to turning the tide to mitigate the interrelated consequences of climate change and its deleterious effects on child health ([Uddin et al., 2021](#)). We propose that the time is now to enhance global child health from an environmental justice perspective to improve child health around the world and across the life span ([MacNeill, McGain, & Sherman, 2021](#)).

Regarding nutritional food insecurity, families around the world have been forced to modify their lifestyles and dietary behavior in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic ([Zemrani, Gehri, Masserey, Knob, & Pellaton, 2021](#)). To this extent, child malnutrition is rising because of decreased access to health care and nutrient-rich foods ([Akseer, Kandru, Keats, & Bhutta, 2020](#)). Moreover, a combination of drastic social distancing measures and economic fallout has substantially impacted the lives and behaviors of countless children and families around the world ([Zemrani et al., 2021](#)). Moving forward, governmental systems and key stakeholders need to consider the widespread and likely long-term effects of this pandemic. Such insight is extremely valuable for developing strategies grounded in evidence-driven policies that recognize the need for international collaboration ([Akseer et al., 2020](#)). Health inequalities and nutritional food insecurity among children are challenges regularly faced by nations around the world ([Zemrani et al., 2021](#)). Pediatric nurses have the capacity to support their neighborhoods and populations through monitoring and addressing nutritional food insecurities among their patients ([Simon & DeBrew, 2021](#)). We can advocate for policy changes to improve access to nutritional foods with the overarching goal of mitigating negative pediatric health outcomes (i.e., acute and chronic diseases) while meeting their health care needs ([Thomas, Miller, & Morrissey, 2019](#)).

Global pandemics (i.e., COVID-19) are detrimental to child health, and an improved understanding of their effects will enhance the ability of pediatric nurses to respond to such crises. Managing the occurrence of global pandemics needs to be a top health priority for achieving global child health ([Corless et al., 2018](#)). Since the onset of the pandemic, approximately 13 million children have contracted the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 virus ([American Academy of Pediatrics, 2022](#)). It is important to prioritize caregiver worries about the transmission of diseases, the safety and efficacy of vaccination, and the importance of mental health among children. Members of NAPNAP are critical resources in this regard ([National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, 2021](#)). PNPs and APRNs are encouraged to

collaborate with their interprofessional and interdisciplinary colleagues to pool available resources to promote the best quality of pediatric care in the context of limitations issued by the pandemic ([Efendi et al., 2022](#)). These nurses must also engage in active learning around the pandemic and embrace an adaptive mindset to overcome such limitations. Furthermore, they must be a reliable source of information to advise families and their children about how to navigate through these challenging times ([Peck, 2020](#)). However, this is not limited to solely the current pandemic but also other infectious diseases that children are vulnerable to (i.e., malaria, pneumonia, diarrhea, tuberculosis, and HIV). Although diseases associated with these infections are quite preventable, they are unnecessarily experienced by thousands of children every year ([United Nations Children's Fund, 2022](#)). Therefore, pediatric nurses can encourage the development of policies to fight infectious diseases on a global scale.

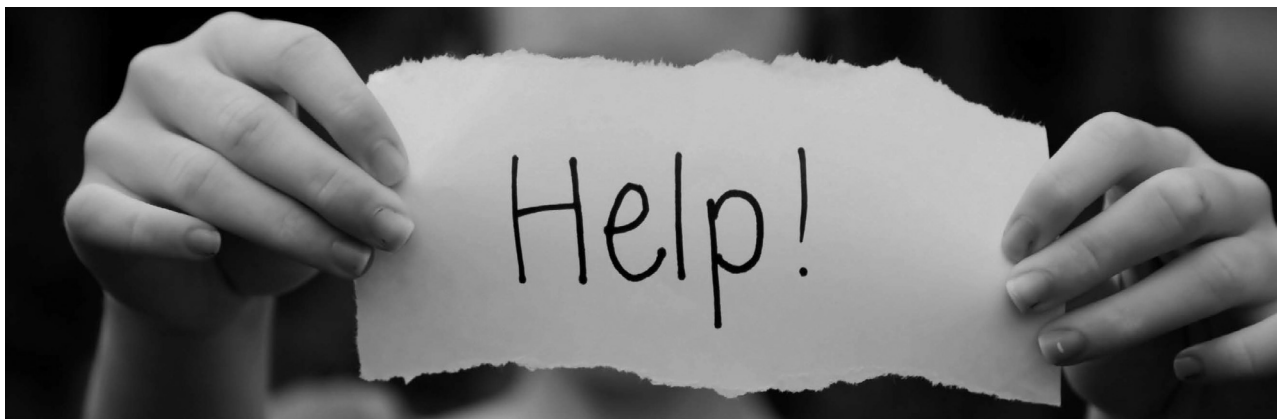
Child trafficking also remains a top priority for pediatric nurses. Child trafficking and sex trafficking are significant global health crises that have long-term consequences on children, families, and communities ([Greenbaum, 2020](#)). PNPs and APRNs must be aware of the consequences of child trafficking to support these children and their families through trauma-informed care. This orientation of care places a specific emphasis on managing the trauma experiences of these patients without further traumatization. This is done to promote their resiliency through education and empowerment ([U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Trafficking in Persons, 2021](#)). PNPs and APRNs may also collect evidence (i.e., via research) which may serve as the foundation for future endeavors such as policy changes and preventive agendas ([Greenbaum, 2020](#)).

Advanced pediatric nursing skills are critical for advocating for the health of children around the world. This directly relates to the accountabilities of pediatric nurses to reduce suffering and maintain the health of their patients and the global community ([Nemetchek, 2019](#)). These accountabilities are driven through the lens of social justice, which is central to pediatric nursing care in both the local and global arena. Therefore, by ensuring the health of children locally, nurses are contributing to global child health globally.

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