

# 2.1m babies born with mental deficiency: Experts

**ISLAMABAD**—Health experts on Monday said that an estimated 2.1 million children are born each year with mental deficiency in the country due to iodine deficiency in pregnant women.

Speaking at the follow up meeting of National Alliance of Media on promotion of breastfeeding and universal salt iodization and appreciation awards ceremony for best writing/coverage here, speakers said that goiter rates among school age children are 4.3% in urban and 8.2% in rural areas.

They said iodine deficiency in children leads to mental retardation, loss of cognitive abilities, still born, miscarriage, birth of children with congenital abnormalities like deaf and dumb and stunted.

They said according to national nutrition survey, the national prevalence of goiter among women was 21%. They added the urinary iodine test results revealed a bigger figure of about 36.5% of mothers and 23% of pre-school children suffering severe iodine deficiency.

They said the utilization of iodized salt at the household level was only 17% despite 56.4% respondents being aware about iodized salt.

Communication Specialist UNICEF Ms Sheeba Afghani said that iodizing edible salt is an easy and inexpensive way to provide the iodine children need so that they can achieve full potential in school and in practical life.

She urged to have three pronged strategy to address the iodine deficiency disorders in the country included legislation for universal salt iodization, supply side interventions and demand creation activities.

She said media role is important to create awareness among people about the issue and asked to make strategy in this regard by the forum constituted for the purpose.

Executive Coordinator The Network Dr. Arif Azad said that the most common way to prevent such pervasive public health problem is universal salt iodization.

He added due to low con-

sumer demand, lack of quality control and absence of legislation there is low production and consumption of iodized salt.

He said the problem is further accentuated by the fact that the quality of salt production and its iodization are not controlled through a proper regulatory mechanism due to which even the salt which is labeled as iodized may or may not be iodized actually.

He urged all sector, institutions both public and private, individuals, parents and children to come forward and join hands in cause of elimination of iodine deficiency disorder from the country.

Adnan Ahmad from Intermedia said that it is high time for maximum coverage of health related issues in print and electronic media like breastfeeding and iodine deficiency disorders besides others.

He said health journalists should contribute regular articles and features on challenges in health sector, policy areas and new developments.—APP