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A support system for special children

Only **53%** habitations in India have a primary school, **change that.**

Express News Service

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KOCHI: 'Prathyasa', a Down's Syndrome support group was formed at the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, Cochin on Sunday. Down's Syndrome is the commonest genetic cause for mental retardation in children.

Its incidence is approximately one per 800 live births. Down's syndrome is due to an abnormality in chromosome number. All human beings have 23 pairs of chromosomes in each cell normally but in Down's Syndrome, instead of 46 chromosomes, there will be 47 chromosomes.

Even though for all pregnant women there is a risk to give birth to a baby with Down's Syndrome, the risk increases with the age of the mother.

Although the general risk is one in 800 live births, when a 45-year-old mother gives birth, the risk is as high as one

in 28.

This does not mean that majority of children with Down's Syndrome are born to elderly mothers. About 80 percent of children with Down's Syndrome are born to mothers less than 35 years. This is because more than 90 percent of deliveries occur in women below 35 years.

Short stature, mental retardation, congenital malformations of heart, delay in attaining various developmental milestones are among the symptoms. These children also suffer from deficiency of thyroid hormone which is essential for brain development.

To attain maximum brain growth and to make sure that these children grow to independent self sufficient adults, early detection of various abnormalities and early intervention are very important.

Confirmation of diagnosis is very important. This is done by a blood test called karyotyping. This helps in planning further management and also to detect the risk for the next child to develop the same problem.

Having a child with Down's syndrome is an unexpected trauma and most parents would overcome it successfully.

Their experience and reassurances will be definitely useful to a couple who is having a baby who is diagnosed with Down's Syndrome.

The confidence they can impart will be much more than the doctors could do. Also there will be lot of things which parents can share.

These motivated parents can embark on ventures like schools, vocational training centres, physiotherapy centres, counselling centres and job opportunities for these children. This is what the Down's Syndrome support group is expected to do, according to AIMS officials.

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