

The elimination of child poverty and the pivotal significance of the mother

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Abstract

The child poverty not an independent condition: it is intimately related to the ecology of the family. Its elimination will involve the elimination poor maternal nutrition, low birthweight and its lifelong consequences in chronic ill health and poor learning. Maternal nutrition and health is a prime determinant of the future of the child and also of her own health, mental state and ability to manage child care. Maternal nutrition and health is also relevant to the future employment opportunities, health, skills and literacy and social behaviour of the new born. Poor maternal nutrition and adverse outcomes conspire to maintain the state of poverty. Children need to be empowered by knowledge. Nutrition, health and home economics should be introduced from pre-school to advanced levels in the school curriculum. It makes little sense to educate children with everything they need to know except how to take charge of their own health, reproductive capacity, cognitive development and that of their own children that they are likely bear. Today non-communicable diseases account for more deaths than all the HIV-AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis combined. The Global Forum for Health predicts that the top three burdens of ill health world-wide will by 2020 be heart disease, perinatal conditions (adverse pregnancy outcomes) and mental ill-health. Unfavourable nutritional conditions contribute substantially to the cause of these three conditions and other non-communicable diseases. Yet children today grow up in ignorance of the science of nutrition and health and become leaders in industry and government with little understanding of nutritional science which could, if taught properly, lead to large scale reductions in chronic disorders, substantial cost savings in the health services and especially in the enhancement of population skills and prosperity. It is also evident that education alone will not suffice. The priority in human development is vested in the brain. Nutrition and food policies last century were based on protein and growth. This century they should be re-aligned to take the human priority of the brain nutrition into account.