

Early Childhood Health, Nutrition and Education

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Abstract

Before children reach school age they must negotiate threats from a number of diseases. More than 50% of child deaths are caused by pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria, measles, malnutrition and HIV. Health and nutrition can affect education in many ways. In resource-poor countries, physical and mental disability can be a major barrier to schooling. This can result from iodine or folate deficiency or rubella infectious in utero or from cerebral malaria, polio or meningitis infections postnatally. Malaria infection, undernutrition and orphanhood can influence the likelihood and timing of enrolment. School readiness depends on cognitive, motor and socio-emotional development which can be affected by, among other things, undernutrition, iron deficiency anemia and malaria. There is clear evidence of the benefits of preschool health and nutrition interventions to tackle these three conditions, with economic returns to \$1 spent estimated at \$3 for nutritional supplementation and \$14 for iron supplementation. For malnourished children, psychosocial stimulation can be as effective as nutritional supplementation in compensating for delayed cognitive development. In general, interventions in this age group have substantial and consistent effects on development and education which are generally larger than for school-age children. Effects are seen in all dimensions of school readiness – cognitive, motor and socioemotional development – but are perhaps greatest for motor development. The interventions are highly cost-effective compared with other educational interventions. They also have a greater impact on the most disadvantaged children and can help to promote equity in educational outcomes. Early childhood health and nutrition interventions have the potential to make a major contribution to achieving Education for All.

Key words: Early Childhood Health, Nutrition, Education

Full text:

https://www.unscn.org/web/archives_resources/files/Early_childhood_health_nutrition_an_509.pdf