

CHILD SURVIVAL UNDER THREAT

DOMINIC. E. AZUH



Child Survival

Under

Threat:

A Cross-Sectional Study in India

Dominic E. Azuh



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*In Honour of
My Mother and Father*

&

*In Memory of
My Beloved Sister Clara*

“ Children are an heritage of the Lord”.

—PSALMS 127:3

“ Reducing under-five deaths would also help toward the further slowing down of population growth because families tend to have fewer children when they become more confident that their existing children will survive”.

—UNICEF, 1988

Foreword

Foreword to a book is primarily a succinct review of its contents and essentially a fore-runner to inform the readers on the quality, utility and worthiness of it. It is with extreme pleasure and happiness and with a sense of honour to me, I am writing this foreword to the book — Child Survival Under Threat: A Cross Sectional Study in India.

Ecology is the branch of biological science that deals with the relations between living things and their environments or surroundings. In this, the study of population ranks as one of the most important parts. Through the study of ecology, man learns to preserve favourable balances of Nature. Indiscriminate dumping of domestic and industrial wastes, unchecked felling of trees and burning of forest cover, unthinking industrial practices are all turning our ecological systems to the worst affecting seriously the mankind. The statistical picture is alarming and woesome. Yet, in our cynical, over-informed society, the typical reaction to ecological horror has been one of neglect with a generalised statement that "it is not going to happen in my life-time any way." It is, therefore, only necessary in this context for making an appeal to people's conscience to save the planet for children's sake from irreversible and irreparable harm to life on earth and from the threats facing human freedom and dignity. Ours is a society of bundle of superstitions, unbelievable myths and unintelligible and conflicting ideas that are dished out as our way of living. In many of the welfare activities, people's participation and commitment is comparatively less.

Culture refers in a broadest sense to all distinctively human activities and includes achievements in every field. Through many generations, man has acquired more and more knowledge, and cultures have grown and changed. Various cultures stress different traits.

The basic activities of life include growth, nutrition, reproduction, responsiveness and movements. Man is the most remarkable of all the creatures that live on earth. The potential length of life of all living things is determined primarily by heredity.

In everyday language, evolution means almost any kind of orderly development. Health is a lever and motivating force for human and social development. Good health is a pre-requisite for social and economic development. Human health and well-being are thus one of the most important components of human development.

Studies on morbidity and mortality pattern of children in any country form an index, if not a real basis, for identifying disease inter-relationships as well as the major underlying causes. It should be recognised that children and the young are the agents of development in a world bequeathed to them.

The First World Summit for Children, in September 1990, set out clear goals for further improvement of infant and child health over the next decade and many of the targets projected are specific to the major causes of child mortality and morbidity. Despite an 8% increase in the number of births in the developing countries as a whole between 1985 and 1990, the estimated number of child deaths (below age 5) fell from 13.5 million in 1985 to 12.9 million in 1990. In other words, the global improvement in child survival more than compensated the increase in the population of young children, with the net result that the total number of child deaths declined by about 4-5% over the period. The assessment of the causes of child death is complicated by the fact that often multiple pathologies are present at or around the time of death, making it very difficult to determine accurately the underlying cause of death. Recent indications are that pediatric AIDS deaths are likely to increase substantially in future.

Healthy survival is still a challenge despite massive health infrastructure, life-saving drugs, dramatic advances in medical research and technology.

Viewing from the above concepts of Ecology, Culture and Development with relevance to child mortality and survival, the combination of studies is the first of its venture and kind, undertaken by Mr. Dominic and presented in his book. With an empirical approach, the study deals with the determinants of child mortality and survival through his work carried out in Guntur and Kurnool Districts of Andhra Pradesh

in India. It is a retrospective study of 2000 families (respondents) drawn out from different cultural groups. A multi-stage random sampling procedure was adopted in the selection of samples. Elaborate and constructive interview methods were applied for collection of data, and the analysis was made by using computer and statistical techniques.

The study, exclusively on child mortality and survival, and the conceptual model employed are unique and innovative for finding out the probable causal relationship between independent variables and dependent variable. The path-analysis, stratification and the selection of samples, amply speak about the methodical approach to the study, which aims at a qualitative work-result, designed to fill in the gap-in-knowledge in this area, particularly mortality.

The book with its introduction, takes the readers through its eight chapters from ecological factors, child mortality and survival to cultural characteristics, socio-economic correlates, socialization and nutritional status and multiple determinants of child mortality with summary and implications. Due care has been taken to the aspects of theory, methodology and application in the study process.

No doubt, the book will serve as a source material for health planners, health administrators, social workers and service organizations, and the findings will be useful in planning and implementing interconnected interventional strategies towards reduction in child mortality and in general towards welfare of children.

May I end this foreword with an adage—

“Never believe that you can’t
make a difference”

Pondicherry-605006
India

Prof. P. Raja Ram
Dean and
Director-Professor &
Head of the Dept. of
Obstetrics & Gynaecology,
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Post Graduate Medical
Education and Research

Preface

Mortality of young children under the age of five constitutes the single largest age specific death. Despite the recent decline in infant and child mortality, an estimated 14 million children under the age of five died in 1990 in the developing countries. This human tragic loss affects not only families and communities but also the economic and social development of the developing nations. The proportion of children's death in India is far from satisfactory. Sunday of third to ninth January, 1993 reveals that India alone is responsible for virtually one-third of the developing countries' total deaths of children under five years of age. For a meaningful reduction in this direction it is essential to have an adequate and reliable knowledge of the combined impact of the various factors beyond the sum of their individual effects. Ensuring child survival through viable and acceptable basic services (such as proper feeding practices, fortified supplementary diets, birth spacing, clean drinking water, functional literacy of mothers, immunization, use of oral rehydration therapy, simple sanitary habits and so on) is a major dimension of human developmental needs and requires great and critical input in any nation's human resource development efforts. And it stands to reason that all talk of social progress and development would be absurd without assured survival of children and their mothers. Paradoxically this human tragedy and child mortality in particular has been a neglected dimension of study.

It is imperative to state that large mortality differentials in socio-economic, ecological, demographic nutrition and health variables still persist in India and other third world countries. In addition, child mortality related variables have a substantial effect on the fertility of the population, the fear of which retards the performance of family planning programmes.

Hence, improving child survival in promoting family welfare programmes, is an imperative prerequisite for the control of population explosion in the developing countries. Written from this perspective the present book which is based on the Ph.D. thesis of the author under the title 'Ecological and Socio-cultural Factors Influencing Childhood Mortality', submitted to S.V. University, Tirupati, India, marks a step forward in identifying the major factors affecting the lives and well-being of our children and aid in the prioritisation of health and development interventions.

To Professor K. Mahadevan, who guided and supervised this work, I am immensely indebted. But for his generous and unstinted help the present investigation would have been impossible. To my parents, and to brother Mr. Nwaeze, I am extremely beholden for their devoted assistance, blessings and unfailing support which made the burden of this venture lighter. I am thankful to Dr. S. Sivaraju, Reader, TISS, Bombay and Dr. Susan Pasquariella, Head Librarian, Population and Family Health, Columbia University, New York, for the rare assistance and support extended by them. I owe sincere thanks to my various colleagues and friends for their in-depth suggestions and moral support during the none too easy a task of investigation and writing of book. With grateful thanks and appreciation I place on record the friendly co-operation of the respondents during the survey out of which this book was evolved. The keen interest of Sri N. Lokanadhan, who typed the manuscript, deserves particular mention and appreciation.

Tirupati
March, 1993

Dominic E. Azuh

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