

Reducing Stunting, Low Birth Weight and Underweight in Anuradhapura District in Sri Lanka, by Identifying and Addressing the Underlying Determinants of Under-Nutrition and Strengthening Families and Communities to Address Them

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Abstract : Introduction: Nutrition strongly influences good health and development in early life. This study, based on a health promotion approach, used a community-based intervention to improve child nutrition. The approach provides the community with control of interventions, thereby building its capacity and empowering individuals and communities. The aim of this research was to reduce stunting, low birth weight and underweight in communities from Anuradhapura District in Sri Lanka, by identifying and addressing the underlying determinants of under-nutrition and strengthening families and communities to address them. Methods: A health promotion intervention was designed and implemented-based on a logical framework developed in collaboration with members of targeted community. Community members' implements action, so they fully own the process. Members of the community identify and address the most crucial determinants of health including child health and development and monitor the initial results of their action and modify action to optimize outcomes as well as future goals. Group Discussion, group activities, awareness programs, cluster meetings, community tools and sharing success stories were major activities to address determinants. Continuous data collection was planned at different levels. Priority was given to strengthening the ability of families and groups or communities to collect meaningful data and analyze these themselves. Results: Enthusiasm and interest of the mother, happiness of the child/ family, dietary habits, money management, tobacco and alcohol use of fathers, media influences, illnesses in the child or others, hygiene and sanitary practices, community sensitiveness and domestic violence were the major perceived determinants elicited from the study. There were around 1000 well-functioning mothers groups in this district. 'Happiness calendar', 'brain calendar', 'money tool' and 'stimulation books' were created by the community members, to address determinants and measure the process. Evaluation of the process has shown positive early results, such as improvement of feeding habits among mothers, innovative ways of providing early stimulation and responsive care, greater involvement of fathers in childcare and responsive feeding. There is a positive movement of communities around child well-being through interactive play areas. Family functioning and community functioning improved. Use of alcohol and tobacco declined. Community money management improved. Underweight was reduced by 40%. Stunting and low birth weight among under-fives also declined within one year. Conclusion: The health promotion intervention was effective in changing the determinants of under-nutrition in early childhood. Addressing the underlying determinants of under-nutrition in early childhood can be recommended for similar contexts.

Keywords : birth-weight, community, determinants, stunting, underweight

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