



Cycle Of Violence and Poverty: Maternal and Child Malnutrition Among Indigenous Populations of Ecuador



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Submission: July 13, 2022; Published: July 18, 2022

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Mini Review

In developing countries, about 19 million babies are born each year with low birth weight (less than 2500gm). When malnutrition is perpetuated from generation to generation, it becomes an obstacle to the development and sustainability of societies¹. It is known that malnutrition begins in the intrauterine life, so it is necessary for the mother to have adequate supervision and care during her pregnancy, or even better, a medical review and planning on the care of her diet and an adequate consumption of supplements. , to ensure that the child will have adequate development both in its intrauterine life and guarantee adequate growth, just like the mother in her daily life, so focusing on them is essential, since pregnancy is a decisive moment for the prevention of malnutrition in newborns. Focus on the mother, since pregnancy is a decisive moment for the prevention of malnutrition in the child, since, if the mother is malnourished, she may have a greater probability of having a baby with low birth weight, and this child will have a delay in growth during childhood. It can be treated, even before pregnancy, having adequate control of the mother both before and during pregnancy and at the time of delivery, guiding the mother as the feeding of the child should be at each stage of life².

In poor countries like Ecuador, a vicious circle of poverty is evident, in which pregnant and malnourished women will have children with low birth weight, increasing the risk of continuing chronic malnutrition in the following generations. Having a baby with low weight, means a child with many more prevalences of diseases and with a future growth retardation, physical and intellectual during his childhood. Therefore, it is vital that malnutrition is treated before pregnancy, having adequate control of the mother during pregnancy and at the time of delivery, guiding the mother as the feeding of the child should be at each stage of life³.

There are populations that are much more vulnerable to malnutrition, such as those that live in urban-marginal or rural areas, areas where the majority of indigenous populations are located. Identifying risk factors that increase the prevalence of chronic malnutrition is crucial to prevent the onset of diseases in adulthood and even avoid a high percentage of maternal and child mortality that can be associated with infections and preventable diseases.

Poverty, inequality and poor education in mothers in indigenous areas of Ecuador, become real risk factors that contribute to increasing chronic child malnutrition⁴. These risk factors are directly related to two components, one linked to economic and environmental factors, such as the state and type of housing and the quality of basic services, especially drinking water in the child's home ; and two, to sociocultural factors, which refer to the beliefs and practices that certain family members have about motherhood and child development, for example breastfeeding and inadequate weaning, in addition to the time of care for newborns, which could be sociocultural risk factors that contribute to increasing malnutrition. Another factor is related to the levels of education, since in many indigenous communities, women are educated and socialized to marry before the age of 15, this implies early motherhood and a higher birth rate, increasing the risk of having malnourished children both due to poor nutrition, such as short intergenic periods. Another point to be investigated in greater depth has to do with beliefs about breastfeeding, since it has been shown that mothers give breast milk, up to 6 months of age, since there is misinformation about the nutritional value of breast milk. and the belief that after six months it no longer works.

Socio-cultural risk factors are mainly associated with poverty, time and forms of care that mothers and families dedicate

to minors. It is not fair to blame mothers who are the most vulnerable in this chain of violence, just like their children, the chronic malnutrition of mothers and children is the product of brutal social inequality and the little redistribution of wealth that is experienced in a country like Ecuador and that will not change if the economic, political and social model that governs us persists.

(Endnotes)

1 Unicef, 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/ecuador/desnutrici%C3%B3n-cr%C3%B3nica-infantil>

2 Hidalgo Mafla, A. (2017). Factores de riesgo que influyen en el desarrollo de desnutrición en niños de 0 a 5 años en centros de cuidado infantil "guagua centros" sector norte en el distrito metropolitano de quito en el año 2016. DSpace.

<http://repositorio.puce.edu.ec/bitstream/handle/22000/13930/art%20c3%a4culo.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

3 Praveen Goday, S. (2019, mayo). *Desnutrición en niños en países con recursos limitados: evaluación clínica*. UpToDate. <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/malnutrition-in-children-in-resource-limited-countries-clinical-assessment/contributors>

4 Coronado (2014) mentions the direct relationship between homes that do not have basic services or adequate sanitation measures and a high rate of malnourished children under five years of age.



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DOI: [10.19080/JGWH.2022.23.556121](https://doi.org/10.19080/JGWH.2022.23.556121)

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