

Child development, disability and the sustainable development goals

Background

Since 2000 global child health programmes have exclusively focused on reducing neonatal and child mortality without complementary attention to the quality of life of the survivors. Although early childhood development (ECD) is now enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), epidemiological data on children with developmental disabilities to guide the formulation of intervention policies is lacking. This presentation examines available evidence on the global burden of developmental disabilities among children younger than 5 years within the framework of relevant provisions under the SDGs.

Method

The Global Burden of Disease (GBD) 2016 database was systematically reviewed to establish the patterns of fatal and non-fatal health outcomes among children younger than 5 years from 1990 to 2016. Current ECD efforts on the global level are analysed in relation to developmental disabilities.

Result

Globally, 52.9 million (8.4% of under-5 population) in 2016 were estimated to have epilepsy, developmental intellectual disability, vision loss, hearing loss, autism spectrum disorder or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in 1990 compared to 53.0 million (8.9% of under-5 population). This global picture was found to mask a 71% increase in the population of children with developmental disabilities in sub-Saharan Africa between the period. A Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) for ECD now exists to address the needs of children who are at risk of not reaching their developmental potentials.

Discussion

Whereas SDG 4.2.1 mandates systematically tracking of all children under 5 years who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, the NCF is entirely propelled by two risk factors, namely, stunting and extreme poverty with very limited consideration for children with disabilities. Concerted multi-disciplinary efforts to ensure that children with developmental disabilities are not left behind are warranted.