



EDİTÖRE MEKTUP / LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The role of environment in determining children's health

Çocuk sağlığının belirlenmesinde ortamın rolü

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Dear Editor,

The presence of a safe, healthy and caring environment is the main link to ensure normal growth and development of children¹. This is an extremely important facet of improving the survival chances of children, as the available estimates clearly suggest that due to environment-related factors close to 6 million children in the under-five year age-group died^{1,2}. It has been proved that children are extremely susceptible to indoor & outdoor air pollution, second-hand smoke, hazardous chemicals, climate alterations, and poor water, hygiene & sanitation standards². This is mainly because of their developing organs & immune systems, and smaller respiratory tracts, due to which they are quite vulnerable^{1,2}.

Even though, the major reasons for child deaths across the world are due to pneumonia, prematurity, childbirth-related consequences, or other infections, most of these conditions are partially caused by the environment¹. In-fact, in the year 2012, it was identified that one-fourth of the child deaths and one-fourth of the overall disease burden among under-five age-group children could be averted by minimizing environmental risks¹⁻³. Also, it is important to understand that the environment related harmful exposure can start even in the woman's womb, which then increases the risk of premature births². The same exposure can continue even through breastfeeding and thus newborn remain at a constant risk for environment induced health hazards².

Acknowledging the reality that the presence of a polluted environment will result in a heavy toll on

the health of our children, it is the need of the hour to make all places safe for children⁴. Further, a wide range of strategies can be tried in various sectors, such as housing (provision of clean fuel for cooking or removal of unsafe building materials and lead paint); schools (ensuring availability of safe sanitation & hygiene, better nutrition, noise-free settings); healthcare establishments (safe water, sanitation and hygiene services); better planning of cities; increase in public modes of transportation; and measures to address industry or agriculture related deterioration of environment³⁻⁵. Further, under the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals, all the nations are working to accomplish a set of targets to improve children's environmental health and to end preventable deaths of children in the under-five year age-group by the year 2030¹⁻³.

To conclude, by ensuring investment in the removal of environmental risks to health, significant health benefits can be derived. Thus, it is the responsibility of the concerned stakeholders to take appropriate interventions to minimize the extent of damage to children health and wellbeing standards.

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