

EXPERIMENTAL CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF NUTRITION

The feeding and development of children give rise to a number of problems which are at present being considered by the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations (FAO and WHO). The first task of UNICEF, for its part, was to provide food for children in the war-devastated countries. It appears that the International Centre would be able to make a contribution in this field by furnishing practical assistance to the Specialized Agencies.

A few suggestions, proposed in conjunction with FAO, may be noted:

I. Study of the Development of Normal Children

This question has never been regularly studied, and it would be useful to bring research workers together, define what they do and do not know, and then draw up a programme of research.

- (a) The question of growth. The curves of growth are more or less thoroughly studied for animals or children. The preparation of curves of growth ought to be generalized and co-ordinated.
Like animals, children at certain times, pass through a series of physiological states separated from one another by crisis - at half weaning or weaning, just before and at the time of puberty. The physiological processes which take place at these times and introduce a decisive stage in development should be studied methodically; the changes in diet which should then be introduced have been empirically and not scientifically established.
- (b) Some research is at present being carried out in different countries with regard to the machinery for re-adjustment, the way in which the nervous system changes and the way in which the child's physical system reacts, but the work has not been co-ordinated.
- (c) The same remark applies to research on child development and malformation. There is a real biochemical change as the child grows. It would be interesting to take note of such biochemical changes in children of all ages.

II. Study of Children's Food

Not much is known of children's food and the Centre might act as an agent of the Specialized Agencies of the United Nations by co-ordinating research.

(a) Milk

Is the use of skimmed milk advisable, and in what cases?
Is it advisable to increase the Vitamin-D content of milk?

Should milk be irradiated with ultra-violet rays?

Everything relating to the various constituents of milk should also be very accurately studied.

- (b) Study of all Food given in Infancy. It should be noted that the problem is not the same in every country.

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As the Japanese have been successful with soya milk (to be checked) it would, for instance, be interesting to discover whether the process can be extended. Can it be applied in other countries?

Discovery of whether anything is to be learned from experiments carried out in far distant countries and whether they can be introduced into other countries.

(c) Children's food at different ages

Why does an adolescent eat more than an adult? Why does he need more proteins?

We observe abrupt changes at different ages, which we cannot explain. Does the same thing happen in every climate?

- (d) We do not know exactly how children are fed in Africa when breast-feeding, which sometimes lasts two years, ceases. We know that the type of feeding may vary from tribe to tribe. The same problem is encountered in certain South American countries and other backward areas.

In three French administrative districts - the Caribbean Islands, Guadeloupe and Martinique - it was observed that the death rate for the first year of life was no higher than the rate in other countries but subsequently reached a very high level. Owing to the absence of demographic statistics, it is impossible to gain any exact idea of the question.

III. Malnutrition

To what extent and in what way, in the different regions of the world, does malnutrition provide a breeding ground for a particular disease. To take the instance of parasitic diseases: in what circumstances does malnutrition encourage the development of parasitic diseases? To what extent does the parasite deprive a child suffering from a deficiency disease of elements he requires, thus affecting the child's nutrition and growth? In countries in which mothers suffer from deficiencies due to malnutrition, are not the children born to them handicapped from the beginning?

IV. Problems concerning the food supplies of peoples.

It is asked, for the purpose of international trade, which types of food might usefully be exported and imported for children (shark's oil, skin milk, some tinned fish, whale meat).

It is not impossible to find excess production in certain countries of goods which are required by others in less-favoured countries.

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All these questions require study. Once ideas on each point have been drawn together, the stage reached must be defined and the lines on which to work must be indicated.

The International Children's Centre, working under the directions of, and in agreement with the Specialized Agencies, might make a useful contribution to the treatment of these problems.