

HEALTH AND POVERTY – a deadly issue

Solutions to many health problems can be simple – if you have access to a good public health system, doctors, essential medicines and relevant education.

Unfortunately, poverty acts as a barrier to these solutions in many communities around the world.

Why preventable diseases still kill

Three billion people, or half the world's population, live on less than US\$2 per day. Many can't afford safe houses to live in or proper toilets. Medicines and school fees are way beyond the budget.

Without clean water to drink and proper sanitation, it's difficult for people to do simple tasks like cleaning, washing and cooking. The risk of infection and disease is high.



Nurses at a World Vision health clinic in Haiti provide care for mothers and their children.

Family members, mainly women, will often spend the entire day fetching and carrying water from the nearest source and it's often contaminated.

Many poor communities live in remote rural areas where health clinics are scarce and essential medicine is limited. This makes them vulnerable to illness and puts lives in danger. An example of this is women in poor countries, who die in childbirth because of lack of health services. More than half a million women die annually of pregnancy-related complications, 99 percent of these in poor countries.

Lower life expectancies

People are likely to die at a younger age if they are living in poverty. The life expectancy gap between many developing and developed countries continues to widen. While Australian newborns, on average, will live to see their 80th birthday, a baby born in Swaziland or Zimbabwe can expect to live just 38 years.

The impact on children

Worldwide, more than 10 million children die each year before their fifth birthday, mainly from preventable illnesses. Over 98 percent of these are in developing countries. In Africa, children are bearing the brunt of extreme poverty, with more than a third of its children at a higher risk of death than they were 10 years ago. Every hour, more than 500 African mothers lose a small child.

There are three main reasons why preventable diseases like measles and diarrhoea remain the major killers of children in poor countries. They are all closely linked with poverty. These are: lack of essential health services, money for medical treatment and adequate sanitation. All simple things we take for granted. And they are not that hard to provide.

Working with communities

Non-government organisations (NGOs) like World Vision work with communities in their struggles against poverty and for their right to basic health services. Project activities include the building of healthcare clinics, providing essential medicines and health education, and training local community members to become qualified health professionals. Many participants become birth attendants, nurses and doctors. World Vision also helps communities access safe drinking water and improve sanitation.

In Australia, World Vision works closely with Indigenous communities in the area of health. Currently the focus is on two communities in the Northern Territory and the community of suburban Armadale in Perth. The infant mortality rate among Australia's Indigenous people is two to three times higher than the general population. Indigenous Australians have the worst health of any Indigenous population in a rich country. On average, Indigenous Australians will die 20 years earlier than other Australians.

In today's world, children should not be dying from easily preventable diseases. All children are entitled to basic healthcare regardless of their economic situation. NGOs like World Vision work collaboratively with communities around the world to make this a reality.

For you to do

1. People living in poverty are more likely to die at a younger age because they lack access to:

- a well funded h _____ s _____
- qualified h _____ p _____
- relevant e _____
- essential m _____
- clean d _____ w _____
- adequate s _____

2. What are two of the major illnesses that kill children in developing countries that are easily treated in developed countries like Australia?

3. Complete the following sentences:

- Half of the world's population live on less than US \$ _____ per day.
- More than 10 million children die each year before their _____ birthday.
- Life expectancy in Australia is _____ years while in Zimbabwe, it is only _____ years.
- Each year, more than _____ thousand women die of pregnancy related complications. _____% of these women live in poor countries.