



NDA

National
Development
Agency

LITERATURE REVIEW

SEPTEMBER 2016

HEALTH AND NUTRITION IN ECD

1. Introduction.

Nutritional wellbeing of children plays a critical role in their development and is recognized that nutritional deficiencies can seriously impact cognitive, physical and other developmental areas for young children. The National Development Plan (NDP) and the ECD Policy Framework recently adopted by Cabinet (December 2015) have recognised this and have placed a priority on addressing quality access to ECD services, which includes a holistic focus on child development (National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy., 2015).

A review of South Africa's MDG (Millennium Development Goals) performance paints a grim picture in respect of food and nutrition security for all South Africans and mortality and wellbeing outcomes for young children more specifically. Nutrition is very crucial towards the development of the children accessing the Early Childhood Development services by fostering investment towards improving the nutritional value of the food being fed to the children at the ECD centers will have a positive impact towards the development of these children. Collective collaboration between the government departments (Social development, health and Basic Education) in addressing and improving the nutritional value of food at the ECD centers.

There is a critical link between nutrition and children's psychosocial development. For example, children who are better nourished and less lethargic are more curious and exploratory, and therefore make better use of opportunities to learn how to problem solve and manipulate objects. Children are also more able to explore and learn when parents provide a stimulating environment and are responsive to their children's verbal and non-verbal cues (Martin *et al.*, 2013). There are a number of conditions, such as children's ages and programme characteristics, under which the impact on growth and development is most likely to be seen. In summary supplementary foods or micronutrient supplements, teaching parents about child development milestones and demonstrating cognitive stimulation activities or other activities to improve parenting skills.

2. Main Body.

However the most feeding problems in infants and young children are temporary, emotional and social development may be impacted in the late childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

a. Overeating.

The prevalence of overweight and obesity increases to the children from two- to five-years old, these children are not only at risk for medical problems (e.g. diabetes mellitus, hypertension, orthopedic problems, obstructive sleep apnea), but also poor self-esteem, disturbed body image, social isolation, maladjustment, depression and eating disorders. Social stigmatization begins as early as preschool and continues into school age as their peers may reject overweight children (Martin *et al.*, 2013). Parental concerns about overeating and obesity may result in inappropriate restriction of their children's diet.

b. Poor eating or not gaining sufficient weight.

The parents may misperceive their children as having insufficient nutritional intake when the children are active and more interested in playing environment than in meals. Some of the parents have inappropriate expectations about sufficient food portions and weights gain (Martin *et al.*, 2013)). Failure to thrive occurs when a child's rate of weight gain has decreased to below the third to fifth percentile for gestation-corrected age and sex, or the child's weight has fallen and crossed two major percentiles in a standardized growth chart. Children with Failure to Thrive may have impaired growth (e.g. height, head circumference) and developmental skills and are at risk for long-term developmental and behavioral problems (National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security., 2013).

c. Feeding behaviour problems.

Parents may have difficulty making the transition from an infant who is cooperative during feeding to a toddler who seeks independence at mealtime. Limited food preferences may be normal and temporary during this period or may develop into a behavioural disorder. Food phobias or a post-traumatic feeding disorder may result from a painful episode (e.g. choking with a particular food) or a difficult experience

associated with a food-induced allergic reaction (National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy 2015).

d. Unhealthy food choices.

Food preferences are established through exposure and accessibility to foods, modelling and advertisements. Most diets are not harmful, although specific nutrient deficiencies should be addressed with some, for example, iron and vitamin B12 in vegan diets. Despite significant improvements, health gains for young children are muted by the variable levels of access to, and quality of, public health services, especially among historically vulnerable African children living in poverty in provinces with a strong rural character and living in under-serviced informal urban areas (National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security., August 2013).

3. Conclusion.

A holistic approach that guarantees both child survival and development is the child's right. Unfortunately early child development is often addressed in a fragmented manner. With children less than three health and nutritional needs to ensure survival are often prioritized over stimulation to ensure development. Whereas with children over three years, the emphasis is on play and education and nutrition, health and protection needs are sometimes neglected (National Integrated Plan For Early Childhood Development In South Africa., 2005). Nutrition and health should be integrated into any centre or school where early child development activities take place. Maternal and child health programs should include health, nutrition, stimulation and protection. This integrated approach is the best way to ensure good child growth and development.

4. References.

1. Martin T., Stein M.D., Yi Hui M.P.H. (2013). Child Nutrition: Impact on psychological and emotional development; University of California San Diego, USA, 2nd edition.
2. National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security., August 2013.
3. National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy 2015. *Limited distribution edition* Approved by Cabinet on 9 December 2015.
4. National Integrated Plan For Early Childhood Development In South Africa., 2005.
5. http://www.nemcsa.org/headstart/ECDHS_D.asp.