

ABSTRACT

The Health and Nutritional Determinants Of Academic Achievement In Jamaican Primary School Children.

Naomi Margaret Ama Clarke

It is well established that poor social background and attendance contribute to failure at school, but little research has been done on the role of health and nutrition factors.

Five primary schools were randomly selected from those serving poor areas of Kingston. All the grade 5 students (n=755) were given the Wide Range Achievement Test. All the succeeding (n=167) and failing (n=158) students were identified. A comprehensive number of health, nutrition and socio-economic variables were assessed at school. Further information was collected from a subsample of succeeding (n=43) and failing (n=40) students at home.

We found that the health and nutritional status of the children were not optimal. The failing students were worse off, than the succeeding students, in a wide range of health, nutrition and socio-economic variables.

In order to determine the variables which best predicted attendance and achievement multiple linear regression and discriminant function analyses were carried out.

In the larger sample, the socio-economic variables which predicted school achievement were the number of exercise books, the uniform rating and the possession rating. The health and nutrition variables which predicted achievement after controlling for SES, were height-for-age, haemoglobin, lead and ferritin levels, clinic attendance, cold and fever in the previous month, breakfast history, gender and age of the child.

In this sample, the socio-economic variables which predicted school attendance were the uniform rating, the possession rating and the number of exercise books. The health and nutrition variables which predicted attendance were weight-for-height, hospital attendance for injury, lead and haemoglobin level.

The results obtained from the students visited at home were similar and therefore validated the results found in the larger sample.

In conclusion, poor health and nutrition were found to contribute significantly to both school failure and school attendance after controlling for the socio-economic variables.