REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE ON THE ASSESSMENT OF TESTS
OF BEHAVIOR FROM STUDIES OF NUTRITION
IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE
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Under the joint auspices of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Pan American Health Organization, a conference on the Assessment of Tests of Behavior from Studies of Nutrition in the Western Hemisphere was held in Puerto Rico from October 20 to 23, 1970. Conference participants listed in Appendix I represented the disciplines of pediatrics, nutrition, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and public health and included relatively equal numbers of individuals from North America and Latin America.

Over the last decade it has grown increasingly evident that an understanding of the relationship between malnutrition and intellectual development requires the clarification of at least three issues. First, we must identify behavior tests which are significant indicators of cognitive development and that are applicable across a broad range of cultures. Second, since it is doubtful that a physiologic stress in development affects all aspects of cognitive growth equivalently, it is necessary to identify measurements which are especially useful in estimating particular aspects of developmental competence and the relation of these to nutritional stresses. Third, since malnutrition is almost always associated with cultural disadvantage and with the general stress of environmental and familial inadequacies which may in themselves affect cognitive growth, an assessment of the particular contribution which malnutrition is making to disturbances in cognitive development requires an appropriate technique for separating nutritional from socio-cultural influences as well as a consideration of the interaction between the two sets of variables.

*Prepared by Dr. Herbert G. Birch, Department of Pediatrics, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Yeshiva University, Bronx, New York.
The conference was divided into six sessions, the first five of which were focused upon particular aspects of the problem, the last of which was a summary session for the purpose of reviewing the material presented. The proceedings are being edited by Dr. D.J. Kallen of the Department of Human Development of Michigan State University and they will be published later this year. A brief outline of the report of the proceedings is given in Appendix II.

After a brief introductory meeting, the first session began with a consideration of theoretical and methodologic issues in the study of nutrition and mental development. Three principal topics were presented and discussed as a basis for providing an overview of the present state of knowledge and as background for subsequent discussion. The topics were: the contribution of animal investigations to the understanding of the relation between malnutrition and mental development; the nature of malnutrition in infants and its effect on development; and malnutrition and behavior in the community. In all of these papers, current knowledge concerning the interactions between nutrition and behavior as observed in the laboratory, in the clinic, and in the community, was reviewed. Particular attention was paid to the degree to which the association between malnutrition and faulty behavior outcome in all of these contexts could have been derived, not only from malnutrition but from other independently existing factors.

The second session concerned practical problems in field studies of nutrition and mental development and involved a consideration of four model settings: a rural village, an urban community, head-start programs, and educational interventions. Emphasis was placed on the description of ongoing studies and upon the methodologic and conceptual issues with which they were confronted. Some consideration was given to the ways in which decisions were made in providing designs for distinguishing between nutritional and sociocultural contributions to cognitive growth as well as to examine their interactions.

The third session concerned methods for estimating cognitive and intellectual development in children. The issues were considered from
both the psychological and psychiatric viewpoints. It was clear from
the presentations that different studies have emphasized different
aspects of intellectual functioning as a consequence of particular biases
associated with different techniques for determining and evaluating
cognitive growth. Attention was given to the problem of culture-free
estimates of intelligence and to the ways in which different techniques
allowed the definition of particular aspects of mental growth as affected
by malnutrition at particular points in development.

The fourth session discussed the social milieu in which cognitive
growth takes place and involved a detailed consideration of social class,
other types of social stratification, and patterns of family organization.
It was recognized that though many studies of nutrition and intellectual
development allude to sociocultural variables, few studies have seriously
examined details of the sociocultural situation which may affect early
development. The session sought to suggest techniques for defining those
variables and the contribution of those variables to cognitive growth.

The fifth session concerned social expectations and functional
social competence as manifested in "role development." The issue of
social expectation was considered with special emphasis placed on two
outcome variables. The first of these was the individual's development
of social competence as expressed in the development of his ability to
do things expected of him by his society. The second was his ability to
select from the options available to him and his ability to define a
particular course of social development. The relation of these to mal-
nutrition and to the individual's social position in society were
considered.

The final session summarized the meeting from an anthropological
and a biomedical point of view. General group discussions dealt with
the issues raised and with the possible usefulness of the conference for
improving the design of studies of malnutrition and cognitive growth.
It was recognized that the conference was the opening stage of a cross-
disciplinary dialogue that needed to be continued, and that the maximum
contribution of such a dialogue could not be derived from a single
discussion. It was clear that further discussions at a less general and more operational level were necessary. However, on the basis of the issues discussed and from the beginning interactions between participants, additional more explicitly oriented exchanges could be anticipated.
APPENDIX I

List of Participants

Jaime Ariza
Pan American Health Organization
P. O. Box 2156
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Richard H. Barnes
Graduate School of Nutrition
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York 14850

Herbert Birch
Department of Pediatrics
Albert Einstein College of Medicine
Yeshiva University
1300 Morris Park Avenue
New York, New York 10461

Joginder Chopra
Pan American Health Organization
525 Twenty-Third Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20037

Francisco Cobos
Direccion de Nutricion
Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar
Apartado Aereo 15-609
Bogota, Colombia

Sigmund Dragastin
Growth and Development Branch
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
Bethesda, Maryland 20014

Howard E. Freeman
Florence Heller Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare
Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts 02125

David J. Kallen
Department of Human Development
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48823

Robert Klein
Instituto de Nutricion de Centro America y Panama
Carretera Roosevelt Zone 11
Apartado Postal No. 11-88
Guatemala, Guatemala, C.A.

Michael Latham
Graduate School of Nutrition
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York 14850

Luis Lenero Otero
Instituto Mexicano de Estudios Sociales, A.C.
Londres 40, 5\textsuperscript{a} Piso
Mexico 6, D.F.

Harrison E. McKay
Inter-Societal Studies
Northwestern University
1818 Sheraton Street
Evanston, Illinois 60201

Alfredo Mendez Dominguez
Universidad del Valle de Guatemala
Apartado Postal No. 82
Guatemala, Guatemala, C.A.

Julio Meneghello R.
Catedra de Pediatria
Hospital Roberto Del Rio
Santiago, Chile

Jose Austin Silva Michelena
Universidad Central de Venezuela
Edificio Asovac
Avenida Neveri Colinas de Bello Monte
Caracas, Venezuela

Fernando Monckesberg B.
Laboratorio de Investigaciones Pediatricas
Escuela de Medicina
Universidad de Chile
Casilla 5370
Santiago 3, Chile
APPENDIX II

Proceedings of the Conference on the Assessment of Tests of Behavior from Studies of Nutrition in the Western Hemisphere

PART I:

Introduction ........................................ Merrill S. Read
Welcome ........................................... Roberto R. Williamson
.................................................... J. G. Chopra

PART II: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in the Study of Nutrition and Mental Development

Animal Studies ...................................... Richard Barnes and David Levitsky
Malnutrition in Infants ............................ Henry M. Ricciutti
Malnutrition and Behavior in the Community .... David J. Kallen
Summary of Discussion

PART III: Practical Problems in Field Studies

A Rural Village Study .............................. Robert Klein et al
An Urban Community Study ....................... Fernando Monckseberg
Educational Intervention Studies ............... Harrison E. McKay
Discussant's Paper ............................... Julio Meneghelmo
Summary of Discussion

PART III: Two Views on Cognitive and Intellectual Development

Cognitive Development ............................ Francisco Cobos
Cognitive Development ............................ Jerome Kagan
Discussants' Papers .............................. Luis Ramallo
................................................... Herbert Birch
Summary of Discussion
PART IV: Meaning and Measurement of Social Functions

Social Class .......................................................... Frederick Waisanen
Other Social-Structural Variables .......................... José Austin Silva Michelena
Family and Modernization ................................. Alfredo Mendez Dominguez
Discussants' Papers: ................................................. Constantina Safilios-Rothschild
                                                                 Luis Lenero Otero

Summary of Discussion

PART V: Social Expectation and Function

Social Competence and Use of Options ........................... Marvin B. Sussman
Role Development .................................................. Sigmund Dragastin
Discussants' Papers: ................................................ Howard E. Freeman
                                                                 Reginaldo Zaccara de Sampos

Summary of Discussion

PART V: Summary and Implications

Behavioral and Social Aspects .................................. A. Kimball Romney
Medical and Environmental Aspects ............................ Joseph J. Vitale

Summary of Discussion