Position of Women as a Link between Maternal Education and Child Mortality

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Abstract

The second half of the 20th century met a significant decrease--almost 60%--in global child mortality, but millions of children in developing countries still die from preventable causes each year. Extensive published research confirms a clear link between maternal education and child mortality. One way in which maternal education relates to child mortality is through its effect on women’s position.

This paper outlines the relationship between maternal education and child mortality. It first explains the ways in which education leads to behavioral changes, particularly in the use of existing resources. Behaviors that modify resource use and affect child mortality are identified and discussed. These behavioral changes are then explained as results of the improved position of women. The analysis concludes that maternal education is a process that affects women’s position and that women’s position changes behaviors that reduce child mortality. Policies to reduce child mortality must therefore address women’s education and status.