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Stroke, Heart Disease, Cancer Are Major Drivers of Poverty
Taskforce to end poverty, non-communicable diseases, publishes findings

Bethesda, Md. – Most aid provided to low- and middle-income countries is focused on controlling communicable diseases, like malaria, HIV, and other infectious diseases. However, according to new comprehensive analysis published April 4 in *The Lancet*, the focus should really be on controlling non-communicable diseases, like cancer, stroke, and heart disease – which are actually keeping the poorest communities poor, and negatively impacting economic development in these countries.

The comprehensive analysis – the largest of its kind to date – was published in five papers today by a *Lancet* taskforce, made up of experts from organizations worldwide. The taskforce was developed in an effort to reduce poverty and deaths caused by non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which account for 38 million deaths each year. Bringing together available global data and analyzing hundreds of studies, the taskforce plans to continue publishing regular updates on their efforts over the next year.

Until now, it has been thought that non-communicable diseases (NCDs), like diabetes, or chronic respiratory disease, were only seen in high income countries, but in the papers published today, experts suggest otherwise. Poor and uninsured households are actually more likely to incur catastrophic health care costs from NCDs, and are more likely to forgo care for chronic health problems, compared to higher income households. They also suggest investing in control of these diseases would also result in increased economic growth.

In one of the five papers, “Tackling socioeconomic inequalities and non-communicable disease in low-income and middle-income countries under the Sustainable Development agenda,” experts report that NCDs account for most causes of early death and disability worldwide – which is alarming because these diseases were previously only seen in high income countries, said Dr. Tracey Koehlmoos, an author on the paper, who is now director of the Health Services Administration Division at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

Koehlmoos noted that previously, in international development, the focus has also been on pregnant women and children under age five. While this focus has brought great improvements to infant and child mortality, she said, it is important to address the needs of adults with non-communicable diseases as well.

“These findings provide a gateway to start the conversation with Department of Defense partners in low and middle income countries to help with training providers and the development, and roll out, of low cost, low-tech tools for building awareness, diagnosing, and managing non-communicable diseases,” she said.

The project was part of the NIH-NHLBI and United Health funded Global Health Initiative.

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