

Maternal and childhood nutritional epidemiology and the agenda for health research priorities in Brazil

Two important milestones in the institutionalization and formulation of Brazil's National Policy for Science, Technology, and Innovation in Health were the creation of the Department of Science and Technology (DECIT) in 2000 and of the Secretariat of Science, Technology, and Strategic Inputs under the Ministry of Health in 2003. The elaboration of the National Agenda for Health Research Priorities (ANPPS) can also be considered a major inductor in the implementation of health science and technology in the country.

The Call for Research Projects on Food and Nutrition launched jointly in 2004 by DECIT and the National Research Council (CNPq) is part of this scenario. The execution of this call for research projects was one of the government's recent successful initiatives in funding specific areas of knowledge that are consistent with the ANPPS. The text covers seven thematic areas that signal the importance of research on key Brazilian nutritional problems, like micronutrient deficiencies and childhood obesity. A total of 85 projects were funded, with an investment of more than 4 million reais (some 2.5 million US dollars), an unprecedented fact in the field of food and nutrition in Brazil.

The aim of this special thematic issue is to publish the most relevant knowledge produced within the framework of this group of projects, and to attempt to contribute to decreasing the gaps between the production of scientific knowledge, the population's real health needs, and the appropriate policy-making.

The articles contained in this Supplement present a wealth of scientific knowledge that can have a potential impact on the population's health, if adequately "grasped" by health policymakers and administrators, especially within the national policy on food and nutrition.

For example, a review article calls attention to one of the most intriguing paradoxes in the Brazilian nutritional transition: the coexistence of iron deficiency anemia and obesity in the same settings and population groups, signaling the maintenance of a nutritional transition model with a persistent overlap in the pattern of both delayed socioeconomic development and modernity. The Supplement also includes an instigating debate on the principal strategies for the prevention and control of childhood obesity, highlighting the effectiveness of the family for promoting healthy eating. The original articles include the results of research based on intervention in childhood obesity and iron deficiency anemia. In short, these studies clearly demonstrate that major difficulties still need to be overcome in order to establish effective protocols for controlling these nutritional outcomes.

New knowledge has also been added to the field of nutritional epidemiology, like the association between maternal depressive symptoms and increased risk of early weaning in the first month of life; increased risk of cardiovascular disease in adult women with low fruit and vegetable intake; and the effect of age at menarche and lipid profile on gestational weight gain. It has also been observed that the double burden of disease in nutrition poses a relevant dilemma for contemporary public health, requiring a single agenda as a potentially effective strategy.

The result of this collective effort can be consulted in the pages of this Supplement. As Guest Editors, we thus take pleasure in addressing the research and policy community on food and nutrition, always actively engaged in the search for solutions to the most relevant current nutritional problems in the Brazilian epidemiological context.

Gilberto Kac

Instituto de Nutrição Josué de Castro, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil.
kacetal@gmail.com

Suzanne Serruya

Secretaria de Ciência, Tecnologia e Insumos Estratégicos, Ministério da Saúde, Brasília, Brasil.
suzanne.jacob@saude.gov.br