

HR 360: A history of child survival in developing countries and the West

Helen Epstein

In Western countries, child deaths are very rare except in cases of severe congenital abnormality, premature birth, or accident. But in Africa, Asia and Latin America some nine million children under five die annually, the vast majority from causes that cost pennies to prevent or cure. This issue is timely because 2015 is the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals, set by the UN in 2000. The fourth of these Goals calls for a 60% decline in child mortality in 60 developing countries compared to 1990 levels, and some \$20 billion dollars is now being spent annually by government aid agencies and foundations on programs aimed, in part, at meeting it.

This course will describe efforts past and present by governments, health agencies and foundations to prevent child deaths around the world, and explore why some efforts have been more successful than others. The importance of prevailing social attitudes towards children and women, as well as the political and economic imperatives that drive government action, will be emphasized.

The course is designed to help students develop skills in research and policy advocacy, and to become familiar with the historical, medical and social science literature on child survival. Much of the course will be framed as a series of debates and research questions concerning theoretical and practical issues that have life and death consequences for children in the West and in the developing world today.