

Prevention of NCDs: the potential of early action

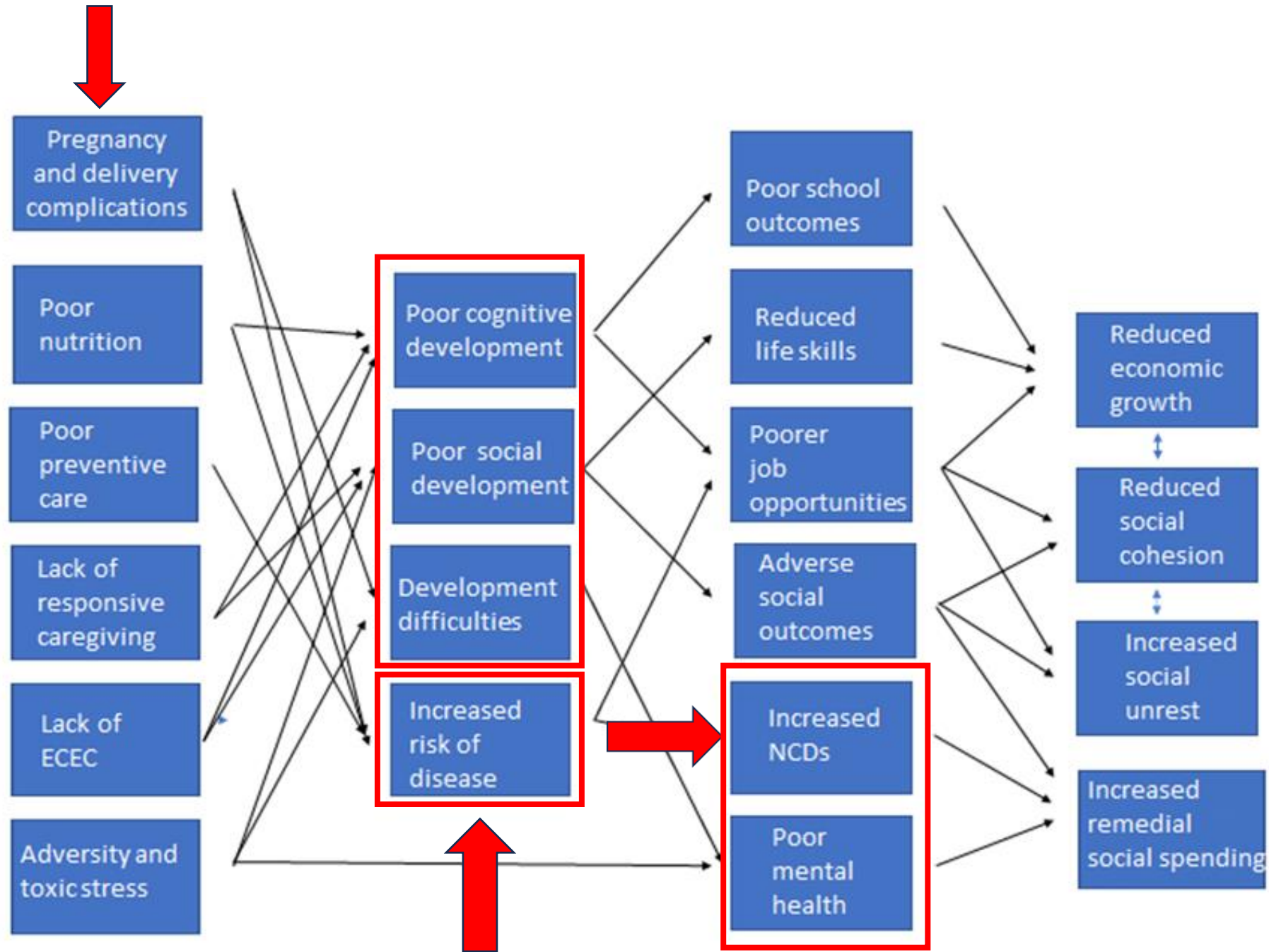
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Non communicable diseases are quite often the consequences of a chain of events that start very early in life

- In the early stage of development organs and systems are particularly vulnerable
- In this window of vulnerability the exposure to toxic substances, infections and trauma, and the lack of adequate nutritional and developmental inputs can hamper the development
- The early altered development of all organs and systems, including central nervous system, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, metabolic and immune systems, leads to effects that are often irreversible and long term



The potential of Early Child Development in preventing NCDs

- ECD includes a variety of prevention areas related to maternal, newborn and young child health and nutrition, as well as the promotion of a nurturing and safe environment for children that minimizes stress and fosters cognitive and socio-relational development
- ECD can contribute to NCD prevention through programmes that promote health and prevent maternal and neonatal complications, support responsive feeding, reduce exposure to adverse events and toxic stressors, improve the emerging life skills, protect from early exposure to digital devices.

The role of the Health Sector

- The HS is a early and universal entry point for prevention
- It plays a role through PHC services, including Family Health Centers, but also through maternity hospitals
- The Universal Progressive Home Visiting programme can play a key role by reaching out to all households including those at higher risk and put the focus on prevention and promotion

Examples of early prevention of non communicable disease

- Prevention of alcohol and tobacco during pregnancy and after birth > prevention of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and of low birth weight > prevention of learning difficulties > school drop out
- Promotion since pregnancy of early paternal engagement in empathetic care of young infants and children > prevention of bullism and violent behaviours in adolescence
- Promotion of healthy nutrition and physical activity since birth > prevention of metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular problems
- Appropriate use of digital devices and promotion of good developmental practices such as shared reading > reduction of digital dependency and school difficulties
- Prevention of harsh punishment and domestic violence > prevention of psychological and behaviour problems

The role of the education sector

- The Education sector can play a significant role in NCD prevention through its preschool, primary and secondary school programmes
- Schools can influence dietary consumption, participation in physical activity and attitudes to exercise.
- *Schools may also be the focus of annual screening for child well-being, including overweight, hypertension or pre-diabetes.*
- Efforts to raise awareness and set norms among children can influence entire households.
- School programmes can protect children and adolescents from abuse of digital devices

Early prevention of NCDs requires a multisector effort

Including:

- The media (TV, Radio, social media)
- The cultural sector (e.g. public libraries)
- All public sectors should give examples of commitment to early prevention (transport and communication sectors, urban development can promote physical activity among children)
- The private sector can contribute through better care of their employees, particularly of new parents and parents to be

If we change the beginning of the story, we can change the whole story

