

PRCPB Working Paper No. 8: Abstract

Begum, Sharifa & Sen, Binayek (2005) Maternal Health, Child Well-Being and Intergenerationally Transmitted Chronic Poverty: Does Women's Agency Matter? PRCPB Working Paper No. 8. Dhaka/Manchester: PRCPB/Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, CPRC/University of Manchester.

This paper is about interconnections between women's empowerment and maternal health, on the one hand, and the health of children and the escape probability from chronic poverty. The literature on intergenerationally transmitted chronic poverty identifies three channels working through economic asset, educational human capital and nutrition-productivity, respectively. The present paper underscores the importance of women's health as another channel through which transmission of poverty is possible. The basic message of this paper is that while household poverty is an important explanator of maternal and child deprivation, the role of women's agency is no less significant in making a difference to favorable outcomes. The empirical results for Bangladesh seem to suggest that women's agency can encourage strategic investments in mothers and children, including adoption of improved health care practices irrespective of gender of the child. And this can happen in case of non-poor and poor households alike, indicating the space for conscious choice in overcoming chronic poverty. The silent role of women's agency needs to be seen as an important supplement to conventional anti-poverty policies.

N.B Also submitted to Journal of Development Studies