

Economic Sanctions as Social Determinants of Health

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Abstract

Background: In the recent years economic sanctions have been very often applied in order to force states to change their behavior at international level and conform to the international law. Many studies show that sanctions are associated with deterioration of people's enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights including right to health. Usually the sanctions regimes are established in the way not to target health of people, but they adversely affect it.

Methods: The aim of this study is to determine how economic sanctions act as determinants of health and affect health of people in the target countries. Data of the study are collected from secondary data produced by academic literature and national and international organizations' reports on the issue of economic sanctions on target countries by sanctions such as Iran, Iraq, the former Yugoslavia, Nicaragua, Burundi, Cuba, and Haiti. The changes in the fields of countries' economy, general welfare of the population, situation of access to medicines, health care and food in the sanctions period are analyzed to determine how sanctions affect health of the population.

Results: Economic sanctions affect health of people in three way; First, by decreasing country's production, revenues, and the value of national currency and increase of unemployment and inflation, it deteriorate the general welfare of the population. In this situation people cannot afford nutritious food and health care. Second, by putting limitation on the shipment and banking and financial services, they make the import of medicines, medical equipment and food difficult that endangers the health and life of people particularly of patients and children. Third, by long term effects on the social systems of the target country, they play a role in increase of mental illness, drug addictions and poor health and development of children.

Conclusions: Economic sanctions affect health of people in target countries and can be considered as important social determinants of health. The use of economic sanctions as a pressure on citizens of a country in order to force the leaders to change their behavior is a violation of right to health and should be banned.

Keywords: Economic Sanctions; Right to Health; Embargoes; Human Rights; Determinants of Health