



Global snapshot of children's chances

Global snapshot of children's chances

13 February 2013

Former BMA president Professor Sir Michael Marmot has welcomed a report highlighting global governments' failure to support family-friendly policies.

Changing Children's Chances contains comparative data on laws and public policies in 193 countries, which has been made available for the first time.

The research aims to focus global attention on these issues to ensure that existing policies are fully implemented and new measures introduced to ensure child welfare.

University College London Institute of Health Equity director Sir Michael said: 'This is so important. The evidence shows that policy makes a difference. We really can do something about it.'

'In the **Marmot report** we said if you want to reduce inequalities in children's health and education you have to reduce inequalities in society. While we're waiting for that to happen, policy can make a difference. Policies can reduce poverty.'

Hotspots identified

The WPAC (World Policy Analysis Centre) report includes colour-coded world maps which highlight countries which are not taking steps known to make a difference in children's opportunities.

It shows countries' policies on issues such as maternity leave, free secondary school education, child labour, child marriage, breastfeeding breaks at work and benefits for disabled children.

The findings include:

- Although universal free primary education is available in 166 of the 174 countries from which data was available, 61 countries still charge for secondary education
- Six countries have no minimum age for employment; in five countries children can work from age 12 or 13, in 29 countries at age 14 and in 63 countries at age 15
- In 54 countries girls are permitted to marry between one and three years younger than boys, which can result in them being taken out of education early
- Only 58 countries provide cash benefits to cover the needs of children with disability.

Sir Michael added: 'Now at long last we have some idea of what's going on in different countries.'

WPAC founding director and University of California dean Jody Heymann, who co-authored the report, said: 'Our findings show how far nations still have to go to realise a world where all children have a chance to thrive, not just survive.'

The report calls on world leaders to use its findings to help shape the post-2015 global agenda.

Recommendations include free universal secondary education, establishing a minimum age for marriage which is equal for both sexes, ensuring minimum wages are high enough to lift families out of poverty and guaranteeing maternity, paternity and parental leave.