
“THE WORLD NEEDS HOME ECONOMICS, BUT DOESN’T RECOGNIZE IT... HOW TO UNVEIL HOME ECONOMICS”

Professor Dr Rubina Hakeem
Principal, Rana Liaqat Ali Khan Government College of Home Economics,
Stadium Road, Karachi-74800, Pakistan
rubina.hakeem@gmail.com

Abstract

Home economists believe that amidst today’s challenges to human wellness home economics has great potential to ameliorate the situation. Evidences albeit sporadic, are found for potential of home economics to contribute to human wellness. Experts realize the need for kind of education that home economics has been providing since more than a century. However recognition of home economics itself as the kind of education needed today is still rare. This paper reviewed the reports and evidences of relevant situations and tried to explore the actions needed for realization of potential of home economics to contribute to human wellness. It emerges that philosophical reviews indicating potential of home economics are relatively easier to find than empirical studies verifying contribution of home economics education to human wellness. Large scale trials or systematic reviews providing robust evidence for potential of home economics probably have never been conducted. Various strategies including conduction of such trials are given for unveiling home economics.

Keywords: Home Economics, Wellness, Education

Background:

The concept of human wellness that lead to the emergence of human economics as a field of study in 1801 is still an unknown or new concept to most of the experts and agencies concerned with human welfare. Consequently strategies adopted for promoting human welfare and assessing progress are also focused on one or a few selected aspects of human wellness. It appears that such fragmented approaches are just changing the nature of threats to human wellness and burdens of various kinds of human miseries from one population to other without having any significant impact on overall wellness at global level. There are indications that well meaning experts often realize the need for comprehensive and preventive measures to promote human wellness but are not aware of existence of a field of study that trains people for education and research in promoting all rounded human wellness through preventive measures. This paper tires to review the situation and explore opportunities and strategies for removing hurdles to realization of the potential of this field of study – Home economics that exist for more than 100 years now by has yet not been recognized as promoter of human wellness.

Methodology:

Available and accessible evidence from various research databases from a variety of fields of studies were reviewed to assess the validity of assumption that homes and universal home economics education has potential for improving and sustaining human wellness at global level. Strategies for rebranding home economics so as to expose its real potential for enhancing human wellness are discussed.

Results:

Wellness includes health and a lot more. World Health Organization defined health in 1946 as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity"(World Health Organisation, 1946). Wellness is "an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a more successful existence" (National Wellness Institute, 2010).

Regardless of terminology used to describe the concept, Home Economics Education has always been focused on promoting the wellness as it is define above. Home economist believed since the beginning of the century that “organization and conduct of home is dynamic and responsive to

society”; “intelligently made alterations assure optimum functioning of homes and wellness of human civilization” and “this requires definite training of dwellers in fulfilling their role as homemakers” (MacDonald & MacDonald, 1927). Betterment of individual, family and community has been the slogan of home economics education. Home economists give more importance to homes as determinants of wellness than any other field, the ultimate beneficiaries of wellness of homes are both individuals and societies. To home economists the term home includes all those units where human being live regardless of type of shelter the form of activity which are carried on, and the grouping of people to be found within the shelter (Fitzsimmons, 1950). Home economists are concerned with quality of products and services that are used by people living in homes as well as with policies and systems that influence them.

Over the years changes took place in this field of study but focus has always remained the same that is wellness of human beings. At present, International federation of home economics describes Home Economics as “a field of study and a profession, situated in the human sciences that draw from a range of disciplines to achieve optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities. Its historical origins place Home Economics in the context of the home and household, and this is extended in the 21st century to include the wider living environments as we better understand that the capacities, choices and priorities of individuals and families impact at all levels, ranging from the household, to the local and also the global (glocal) community. Home Economists are concerned with the empowerment and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, and of facilitating the development of attributes for lifelong learning for paid, unpaid and voluntary work; and living situations. Home Economics professionals are advocates for individuals, families and communities. It tries to empower individuals and families to identify and create alternative solutions to significant everyday challenges and to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions in a diverse global society. The central concern of the field is the physical, economic, and socio-psychological well-being of individuals and families. From its inception in the nineteenth century, the field has used knowledge to improve people's quality of life”(International Federation

for Home Economics (IFHE), 2008). Reviewing the presence of human condition concerns in home economics McGregor states , “home economics started with an unfocused concentration on well-being, moved onto an emergent understanding of wellness and basic human needs (while still holding onto well-being) and, in the process, opened the door to a normative approach to practice couched in the human condition construct”(McGregor S., 2010) .

Evidences for recognition of need for wellness education

The idea of promoting wellness through empowering education has recently gained focus in the field of medicine and to a certain extent in other fields. Evidences from medical research highlight the importance of wellness education. A brief review of evidences from medical research is given here.

Developmental Origins of Health and Disease (DOHaD) hypothesis, that originated in 1990s' assumes that prenatal conditions have life-long consequences. Evidence for impact on metabolic disease has been overwhelming and is emerging for cognitive, social, emotional and mental health issues (Kajantie & Raikkonen, 2009; Raikkonen & Pesonen, 2009; Sullivan & Grove, 2010; Symonds, Sebert, Hyatt, & Budge, 2009; Wright & Enlow, 2008). Educational interventions has shown positive impact (Kafatos, Vlachonikolis, & Codrington, 1989; Taren & Graven, 1991). It could be interpreted from this phenomenon that human potential for wellness is primarily determined by the extent and kind of environment that any home provides to young women. Physical and psychosocial environments can facilitate or hinder young women's' nourishment through a number of ways e.g. access to appropriate food, reasonable workloads and low levels of psychosocial stress. Home economics or in other words wellness education can enhance homes potential to promote maternal and fetal wellness.

There are numerous evidences showing association between wellness of homes and occurrences of health risk for dwellers of any age. This indicates potential of home economics education for improving wellness. A few examples from each area are referenced here. Observations regarding association of home environment and injuries, infections accidental poisonings and allergies are rampant. (Sellstrom, Bremberg,

Garling, & Hornquist, 2000; Cagle, Davis, Dominic, & Gonzales, 2006; Kendrick, Barlow, Hampshire, Polnay, & Stewart-Brown, 2007; Phelan, Houry, Atherton, & Kahn, 2007; Kendrick, Barlow, Hampshire, Stewart-Brown, & Polnay, 2008), (Woolf & Woolf, 2005; Erkal & Safak, 2006; Grey, Nieuwenhuijsen, & Golding, 2006), (Larson & Gomez, 2001) (Melsom et al., 2001; Wamboldt et al., 2002). Characteristics of family and parents are found to influence not only child health and development but also development of health related habits and behaviors. (Vandell & Ramanan, 1992; Sharma, 1997; McCartney, Dearing, Taylor, & Bub, 2007; Keltner, 1992; Goyen & Lui, 2002; Kolobe, 2004; To et al., 2004; Miyake et al., 2007; Rickards, Walstab, Wright-Rossi, Simpson, & Reddihough, 2007; Barlow, Powell, Gilchrist, & Fotiadou, 2008; Oei, Egan, & Silva, 1986; Sallis, Patterson, McKenzie, & Nader, 1988; Strauss & Knight, 1999; Ogden & Steward, 2000; Saelens et al., 2002; Arredondo et al., 2006; Evans et al., 2006; Golan, 2006; Salmon, Hume, Ball, Booth, & Crawford, 2006; Sebok, Schneider, & Harangi, 2006; Nanney, Johnson, Elliott, & Haire-Joshu, 2007; O'Brien et al., 2007; Villard, Ryden, & Stahle, 2007; Matsuzuki, Muto, & Haruyama, 2008; Saied-Moallemi, Vehkalahti, Virtanen, Tehranchi, & Murtomaa, 2008; Levin & Currie, 2009; Pearson, MacFarlane, Crawford, & Biddle, 2009; Pearson, Biddle, & Gorely, 2009) . There is enough evidence to demonstrate that home environment and families influence not only physical development and health but also intellectual development and psychological well being of individuals. (Bradley, Caldwell, & Rock, 1988; McMichael et al., 1992; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Baydar, Brooks-Gunn, & Furstenberg, 1993; Andersson, Gotlieb, & Nelson, 1997; Pridham, Becker, & Brown, 2000; Mackner, Black, & Starr, Jr., 2003; Davis-Kean, 2005; Marturano, Ferreira, & Bacarji, 2005; Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005; McCulloch, 2006; Tong, Baghurst, Vimpani, & McMichael, 2007; Green et al., 2009) (Furman, 1992; Harmer, Sanderson, & Mertin, 1999; Bradley, Conyn, Burchinal, McAdoo, & Coll, 2001; Posada et al., 2002; Barry, Dunlap, Cotten, Lochman, & Wells, 2005; Pachter, Auinger, Palmer, & Weitzman, 2006; Korja et al., 2008; Lim, Wood, & Miller, 2008; Maikovich, Jaffee, Odgers, & Gallop, 2008; Zevalkink, Riksen-Walraven, & Bradley, 2008)

Several large scale intervention trials have shown major role of lifestyle in proliferation of diseases

both infectious and non-communicable disease. Consequently medical experts are now realizing need for contribution of non-medical professionals in the prevention of diseases. In relation to control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), that represent a leading threat to human health and development WHO states, "Considerably more gains can be achieved by influencing policies of non-health sectors than by health policies alone. Because the management of chronic conditions requires lifestyle and daily behavior change, emphasis must be upon the patient's central role and responsibility in health care. Health care for chronic conditions must be re-oriented around the patient and family (World Health Organisation, 2002). WHO is also piloting a project titled healthy homes healthy society. Organizers of World health summit state: "Initiating and realizing adequate and tolerable conditions of life and the way we jointly think and act will be crucial to cope with the health challenges that we are facing in the next years and beyond." "The coalition of academic medicine, governments, industry and civil society will continue to develop and monitor joint solutions to improve health worldwide" (World Health Summit, 2010).

Experts from various fields often realize the importance of what home economics teach. An expert of technology recognizing the importance of homes states: "Another reason to study technology in homes is that it is a rich research field, and has the potential to improve everyday life for millions of users. Also, work and home are intertwined now, and even if workplace concerns are paramount, it is difficult to ignore the work that gets done in homes" (Hindus D., 1999). An individual's ability to make informed judgments and effective decisions about the use and management of their money now becoming popular under the name of Financial literacy has always been integral part of home economics (Wikipedia Foundation Inc, 10 A.D.). The kind of education UNESCO is stressing now is not very different from what home economics is and has been. "UNESCO promotes a multidisciplinary approach to science and technology education and gives particular attention to the provision of basic knowledge, life skills and scientific literacy for all, as well as preparation for the world of work.educational systems are faced with the challenge of science and technology education that has lost relevance not being able to adapt to

current scientific and technological developments”(UNESCO, 2010).

Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) is being adopted as a means to empower young people refers to an interactive process of teaching and learning which enables learners to acquire knowledge and to develop attitudes and skills which support the adoption of healthy behaviors (UNICEF, 1996). This purpose is being served by home economics since 1800's. The concept written in 2007” The challenges children and young people regularly face are many, and require more than even the best numeracy and literacy skills seems to be an echo of the ideas of a home economist presents in 1927 where she stressed need for life style education and called it "fourth R of right living" (MacDonald & MacDonald, 1927). All the above observations lead to an inclination to assume that if these experts and agencies knew enough about home economics they would have simply suggested universal home economics education.

Discussion

How to unveil home economics

Emergence of so many new names for the kind of education that home economics has always been giving is an evidence that world has not recognized home economics. The consequence is that use of home economics made at global level to enhance human wellness is not at par with its potential. Possibility of intentional ignorance of home economics for political or any other reasons cannot be dismissed. No matter what, world is paying the price of this negligence. In the interest of human welfare, Home economists need to work for making true face of home economics visible to the world so vividly that it can be ignored and resources are not wasted in reinventing the wheel. Reasons for misunderstanding needs to be sought and strategies for unveiling home economics should be developed.

One of the reasons may be inappropriate design and implementation of home economics programs. e.g. in Pakistan Lack of cultural and socioeconomic adaptations of home economics programs copied from USA limited its popularity to elite cases. The program failed to proliferate due to high costs of implementation and relative proportion of home economics institutions continued to decrease. Since early sixties, the

program prepared for professions that have only recently gained popularity. Home Economics was wrongly understood a subject that prepared girls only for home life and had no career options. Politicians often stigmatized support to home economics by their opponents as a gesture of conservatism. Lack of public support hindered higher education and research and development of culturally appropriate evidence based information required to update various subjects was hardly feasible. The stigma's proved to be wrong and rate of entry of home economics graduates in gainful employment and business has been much higher than graduates of general sciences or arts. But the system of governance is neither alert nor not responsive to such evidences and removal of stigmas has been hard. Though the graduates of home economics have been pioneers in various fields in Pakistan e.g. dietetics, early child hood education, counseling, interior designing, apparel designing the field failed to get due public support because of lack of understanding by policy makers. Political exploitations of the situation make the situation further difficult for home economists. Use of different names in different countries adds to the problem because it makes the task of convincing the policymakers about presence of home economics at global level more difficult.

Similar problems have been encountered by home economists in other countries however advancement in communication technology has greatly facilitated sharing of experiences and knowledge and home economists are in a better position to work towards removing of stigmas and hurdles that constrained the universal popularity of home economics. Revitalization of IFHE has provided an excellent platform for emancipation of home economics. IFHE website is a very good source of information and has immense potential to further the cause of home economics. Global interest in the kind of education that home economics provides presents a very good opportunity for home economists to market their field of study. Appropriate, timely and targeted actions at this point can determine status of home economics in next centuries. A few strategies suggested on the basis of this review and other are:

Synchronization of alternative names

Name of the field of study has been as issue not because of its inherent meanings but because of

the stigmas attached. The name home economics does not instantly highlights the purpose of human wellness but apparently is the most befitting name for the field used up till now. Renaming as family studies, consumer sciences, human ecology etc has resulted in pushing the field away from the focus on home as centers of human development. Home economics is purpose and action oriented field and its various names adopted up till now in many countries denotes its either any of its function/s or domain/s rather than its purpose. It seems finding short name that encompasses and denotes all that home economics includes has been difficult. As per IFHE consensus the best option is to retain the name and rebrand the field. To contribute to this purpose of rebranding IFHE can suggest a list of acceptable alternative names for home economics and minimum set of knowledge base and competencies required for any program of home economics. The main sphere of action to realize this purpose is small i.e. home though it extends inwardly to individual and outwardly to community. Consumer science is close to home economics but not exactly home economics. Retaining the open door policy, just determining the arena of home economics and exposing the areas covered by similar fields would allow observers to understand home economics. If IFHE website devotes a page for this purpose it may make worthwhile contribution to rebranding home-economics This page can also give details of names used in various countries/states and differences in their contents. Viewers may be provided with options of online contribution and comments.

Guidance of home economists in showcasing of purpose of home economics

Since its inception the purpose of home economics has been betterment of individual, family and community, in other words betterment of humanity though for observers the meanings are not instantly apparent. The practical work of students and teachers done for learning of skills as well as judicious use of skills and other resources has greater visibility than teaching of sciences and philosophies that guide in selection and preparation of goods and use of skills. Observers are unable to see the purpose, strategies and standards related to teaching of skills and the purpose of home economics remains obscure. Several home economists have

highlighted need for this showcasing. One of the missing components of home economics programs has been lack of focus philosophy of home economics and teaching components of home economics without telling enough about home economics itself. Many entry level and even senior home economists would be unable to link all the activities their activities to purpose of home economics. They would benefit from concrete guidance in doing this. Home economics programs at level must be proactive in highlighting the purpose behind activities and training for retaining focus on purpose should ideally be made part of the home economics teaching programs curriculum. A model curriculum and set of lesson plans providing such templates to home economics teachers could be offered at IFHE website.

Fastening areas of specialization to core

As the names of various areas of specialty or have specific names not aligned to the name of the main field of study disintegration and oblivion is facilitated. Perhaps multidimensional nature of home economics limits its visibility. Though all its facets are internally tied by the core purpose of human wellness, the inner system of connections is not visible to world. Probably home economist needs to draw a connecting line on the outside facets by finding a name that has ability to tie together various areas of specialization. For Suppose if we rename home economics education as "human wellness technologies" and all its component areas have human wellness tag added (housing and interior for human wellness, apparel design and textile for human wellness, food and nutrition for human wellness, family economics for human wellness, family studies for human wellness) it may be easier for experts from other field to recognize that particular specialty as part of a larger field of study.

The term technology may be preferable to either sciences or studies because home economics is an action oriented field that makes use of both philosophy and science for planning any strategies or actions. Again IFHE website can play an important role. For example if IFHE home page has a vibrant animated representation of areas of specialization with strong emphasis on their relation to core the message would be available to all the viewers. IFHE may allow use of such animation to its affiliated bodies.

Collating and creating scientific evidence about efficacy of home economics.

We the Home economists know that home economics is wellness education and the world needs it desperately for human wellness. This claim may not be acceptable to most observers who have been exposed to only specific aspects of home economics or only limited implementations of this extremely versatile, dynamic and transformative field of study. Home economists need to provide evidence that is comprehensible to today's scholars and policy makers. They are accustomed either to experiments based evidences, randomized controlled trials and systematic reviews of the same or to interpretations of large international data. Assessing association between home economics and state of human wellness or planning experiments to document impact of home economics education on human wellness is not the same as studying impact of drugs on guinea pigs or human volunteers. Controlling or matching human wellness status of cases and controls is not easy and separating effect of confounding variables during the course of interventions or observations is impossible. However efforts could be made to collect, collate and create evidence in somewhat similar manner. Home economists have made such efforts. Nosheena Saleem's doctorate research provides evidence for significant positive impact of home economics education on wellness potential of rural households in Pakistan. We need large scale international evidences of this sort. Many may already be present in home economics colleges' libraries. Exploring and collating such evidences from as many countries as feasible and making it available for the world to see is one of potential strategies to unveil home economics.

A step further would be planning large scale multicentre international studies to check the hypothesis that home economics education enhances human wellness. Association between home economics education and human wellness could also be assessed by securing relevant data from various countries, assessing and scoring countries for provision of home economics education and relating it to state of human wellness indicators in those countries. Collaborations between institutions to support doctoral and post doctoral research in home economics education would facilitates

accomplishment of such gigantic tasks. IFHE could mediate to get support form international agencies for such large scale projects. IFHE has done a lot to promote home economics and it is apparent that there is a lot more to do.

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