

# The Social Reality of Malaria

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# Malaria: Which Reality?

- Epidemiological Reality : Concerned with quantitative description of the disease malaria
  - Measurement of malaria risk
  - Measurement of malaria burden
- Purely objective

# Clinical Reality

- Clinical reality: Concerned with diagnosis and treatment of the disease malaria
  - Assessment of malaria risk to individual patient
  - Objective criteria mediated by clinician's experience influences the diagnostic process

# Social Reality

- Social reality: The broader context in which the disease is experienced
  - Consideration of the impact of factors such as social, cultural, economic and political environment on perceptions of and responses to the disease

# Social Reality for the Individual

- Patient reality: individual concerned with restoring/maintaining normal social functioning (of self &/or child)
- Response mediated by:
  - Perception of risk
  - Social acceptability of disease
  - Social position of individual (or carer)
  - Social role of individual (or carer)

# Perception of Risk

- Epidemiological risk:
  - quantified, objective
- Clinical risk:
  - clinicians taught based on epidemiological evidence BUT clinicians' perceptions of risk mediated by their experiences

# Perception of Risk

- Individual risk: Subjective assessment based on experience and is context dependent.
  - Physical risk (morbidity and mortality)
  - Social risk (ability to maintain position in society)

# Relative Risk: Physical

- Children suffer many febrile episodes over the course of their childhood
- Many of these febrile episodes will resolve with the use of anti-pyretics
- Accessing appropriate treatment takes time, money and effort and may place other family members at 'risk' (e.g. from hunger)

# 'Risk' in Severe Disease

- High fever and convulsions seen as very dangerous
- Quick on-set - seek nearest available treatment
- Reality – nearest treatment source is rarely biomedical & even if facility available, appropriate drugs & equipment rarely are

# Social 'Risk' & Malaria

- Physical risk of death from severe malaria is high but the social risk (consequences) of such a death is low.
- Death from malaria is a 'socially acceptable death'.
- Uncomplicated malaria – a normal disease
  - *“it's always been part of our life and always will be.”*

# Social Reality: National Level

- Epidemiological data on burden
- Recent increase in funds for tools and technologies

BUT

- Social reality
  - Other priorities
  - Poor infrastructure, inadequate health system, lack of capacity to deliver services

# Social Reality: Global Level

- Considerable time, effort and money spent on developing new tools & technologies
- Lots of talk about problems with implementation and delivery systems

BUT

- Very little time or money addressing the ‘messy social reality’ – the social and political reality of malaria control

# The Social Reality of Malaria

- Until we, at the global level, start to spend as much effort and money on addressing the social, economic and political reality of malaria, as on new tools and technologies, the social reality for people living with malaria will remain unchanged.