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Children's Health by Interdisciplinary Approach of Ahmet Mithat Efendi

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ABSTRACT

Ahmet Mithat Efendi who has devoted his life to raise information and awareness level of people as a writer has shared his emotions and thoughts with his readers over many areas such as history, geography, philosophy over which he has not much expertise and he has tried to increase his readers's levels of information, grace and culture. One of his studies is related with children's health. Despite of the fact that he has not been educated over medical matters, he has tried to show how to maintain health of children by using an interdisciplinary approach about accommodation, food and beverage, studying and resting. In this study, approach of Ahmet Mithat Efendi against children's health has been analyzed and his novel named "Health" has been translated from Ottoman Turkish to Latin alphabet and has been submitted to attention of current audience.

KEY WORDS: Ahmet Mithat Efendi, kid's health, protection against illnesses, interdisciplinary approach for children's health.

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INTRODUCTION

Ahmet Mithat Efendi who is prolific author of Tanzimat Reform Era has devoted his life for reading and make others read and has focused on many areas such as geography, history, philosophy, medicine and has written works mostly in conversation style and has adopted education of public, increasing public's level of information and grace.

Ahmet Mithat Efendi's thoughts about health of children which are among the matters he is interested in are quite important to show the medical approach/perspective/problems etc of the era. Ahmet Mithat has examined all actual matters of the era in his newspapers and in his written works to notify, to warn his readers. He has sometimes applied to views of people who are actually authorized on the mentioned matters in order to support his own emotions and thoughts and sometimes he has criticized these people's ideas.

Ideal approach is that each one of scientific areas should be handled/ investigated/ criticized/ supported by its own expertise. However as we have mentioned above, goal of Ahmet Mithat, the fact of him owning Hacı-I Evvel(First Master/Teacher) title, his working ambition are his most important driven powers about writing in interdisciplinary areas. Memory of Kâmil Yazgıç who is son of Ahmet Mithat Efendi proves the facts we are speaking about:

“We can find natural his information about lessons of junior high school and high school. But what can we say about my weekly interrogation over anatomy, physiology while I was at medical school? In fact, my father was quite busy with medicine even it has no relation with his occupation: in his library of which variety of books was well known by everybody there were many medical books and even a human skeleton. Since Ahmet Mithat has been interested in all matters and scientific areas with his brilliant wisdom within his time limitations and since he is not leaving working, he has been an alive library.”¹

Ahmet Mithat Efendi had been able to talk about anatomy and physiology with his son who was in medical school by only reading related books and he had been manager of Quarantine Administration. In fact, he had assisted famous Cenap Şahabettin to perform his doctorate occupation together with his literary studies:

“Cenap had never used his doctor title in an active manner but had been promoted to be a member in Quarantine Administration by assistance of Ahmet Mithat Efendi who was manager of Quarantine Administration and who was always ready to help everybody who needs and who deserves

help and had started to use this title officially; so he had the chance to perform requirements of his doctorate occupation; so, he had been able to write for literary while performing his main occupation.”²

Ahmet Mithat Efendi had been promoted to Vice President of Committee of Health Affairs by 2nd Abdülhamit. Due to the fact of Ahmet Mithat being an important member of this committee despite of having no experience in health, had made Eşref who was lampooner of the era to write the following poem:

“We are admiring the things you have accomplished
This is no fault, no shame or no sin
As a result of eating meats of dead donkeys, horses and mules
We started to hee haw, kick, whinny”³

As is seen, he had been promoted to important seats in health despite of having no experience and expertise; he had mentioned lots about doctors, pharmacists, medicine, patients and illnesses and even he had been criticized of these facts, he had never quit his efforts to perform his duties and to write such books. At some parts of this writings, he had made some explanations to prevent critics related with giving information about medical matters despite of him not being a doctor.

ANALYSIS

In his books he had mentioned about; China, Latin America examples in patient-doctor relationships, some pharmacists who had made other authors to write books in exchange for a bribe in order to be able to sell their medicines, not to trust over recommendations of doctors who were against marriage at earlier ages, doctors keeping their patients busy in vain, comparison of health of the ones who were applying at the doctors and who were not applying at the doctors, situations at which it was required to apply at the doctor or required not to apply at the doctor, doctors to prescribe medication/patients requiring doctors to prescribe medication, protection ways against cholera, requirement of receiving license from doctors during marriages especially due to syphilis, harms of alcoholic beverages, gambling and cigarette, dangers of using cosmetics and wearing girdle, listening to yourself due to boredom and hypochondria as a result of this self listening, importance of protection of physical and mental health, curing and doctors’ fees in his own style⁴ and basic written book of Ahmet Mithat Efendi about health as of 1887(1303) was *Health* which had been issued under the scope of “Children’s Library”.

Ahmet Mithat had mentioned in the cover of the book that it was a reading book for beginners and his goal had been to notify children about health matters but together with children, he had included adults in his books and had warned them.

At the introduction of the book, it had been mentioned that whenever a person removed the reasons of illnesses, this person would be able to live a health life and it had been mentioned that children were open for reasons of illnesses due to their fragile nature so they had needed protection against illnesses more than adults and it had been emphasized that the ones who would follow the recommendations given in this book throughout his/her life would have a health body and mind. In his book, Ahmet Mithat had mentioned the importance of residences, eating and drinking, clothing, working and resting for health and had also mentioned that at the aforementioned matters it had been important to follow the recommendations of doctors and had mentioned all of these matters in sub paragraphs.

First sub paragraph of the aforementioned matters was “Residence”. Author had mentioned that to live in villages and counties were more healthy compare to live in provinces but due to living conditions, it had been impossible to live in counties and villages so he had emphasized that the residences should have had been wide, sunny and windy, with no humidity and there should have been trees around the residence, inside and outside of residences should have been clean. He had mentioned that it was not proper lots of people to sleep within the same room since weather of the room shall have been polluted due to breathes of these people. Due to polluted air, nor only sleeping people feel discomfort but also people sitting within this room shall have headaches. In order to provide protection against pollution in the room, windows and doors of the room should have been opened every morning to let fresh air in and to let polluted air out.

Rooms should have been kept in a temperature at which people living inside shall not be cold. If ever temperature was too high, the ones who were first inside the room then leaving the room shall have been sick.

If ever charcoal was used in heating the rooms, it should have been fired outside until it had become ashy then it should have been taken inside the room. Otherwise, poison inside less fired coal shall have been breathed inside lungs and shall have been caused headache and even death.

Another matter to be regarded besides the effects of the coal was heavily smelled flowers. These shall have never been kept inside our rooms.

Last matter regarding the residences had been the recommendation of not sitting in front of windows during summer times while the person had been sweaty. It was not a problem to stay in front of the window unless being sweaty.

Second sub paragraph of the aforementioned matters was “eat and drink”. Ahmet Mithat Efendi had emphasized that human beings could not have lived without eating and drinking but eating and drinking should have been performed within a certain order so the children who had behaved against this suggestion were piglike or scrawly. Children should have been fed four times a day. “Two of these should have been main dinner/lunch and two of these should have been breakfast. When children woke up in the morning, they should have either dipped the bread inside coffee and eaten this bread or should have eaten bread together with olive or cheese. During noon, they should have lunch. During mid-afternoon, if the child was hungry, he/she should have eaten a piece of bread or simit. Second main meal shall have been dinner.”⁵

Families knew required intervals in between meals and properly fed their children. Author had given samples over watches for these time intervals.

Author did not want to mention about recommendations of some doctors about eating and drinking since he had thought that most of the people could not have afforded these meals. The important thing was digestion. Unless these meals were digested, these meals were not good, in fact they were dangerous for weak stomachs.

Sweet foods sold outside such as pudding, sugar, fruit, halva should have not been eaten when hungry. Children who wanted to live healthy should have requested these sweet foods from their parents. Parents gave these foods in between the dinner or after dinner. Aforementioned foods which had been eaten in mentioned order were even good for health.

Totten fruits or carrion were very harmful. Especially painted sugars, marsh mellows, sweetened fruit juice were poisonous. Eating ice cream when hungry or sweaty was dangerous. For these reasons, children should have not taken and eaten foods by themselves and should have consumed the foods allowed by their parents.

He had suggested the behavior of Prophet Muhammad who had not eaten whenever he was not hungry and who had been leaving the table while he was not completely full, in the following lines: “We shall say something to children about meal and this saying shall be very useful for them:

‘Unless you are hungry, do not eat. When you eat, do not completely full your stomach and leave the table while you have still your appetite.’

Let me tell you the reason of this suggestion: Unless a person is hungry, he/she eats with no lust. Meal which is eaten with no lust does give damage instead of good. If ever stomach is completely full with meal, this causes problem for the person. Digestion becomes problematic. Since meal blows, grows, increases inside the stomach. If the person leaves the table while there is still appetite, when meal blows, stomach becomes completely full.”⁵

Author did not suggest any other beverage but water. Some doctors had suggested wine due to its benefit but he had rejected wine due to harm of vinegar. Ahmet Mithat had said that there was no good from any one of grape beverages and had mentioned that drinking of a small cup of coffee with no sugar after meal shall have been good for digestion and drinking a good syrup one hour after meal shall have been good to terminate the inside heat.

Author had thought also about smoking tobacco and he had mentioned that tobacco/cigarette was the most dangerous thing not only for children but also for adults. He had especially emphasized that smoking would resemble faces of women to dead people and would cause teeth decay and yellow teeth. A person who had first smoked shall have been dizzy, nauseated and even exhausted.

Tastes of mouths and power of stomachs of smoking people would have decreased; there shall have been tar in their bronchus, they shall have been weak and powerless. Lots of tuberculosis illnesses had been observed among smoking women. The ones who were used to smoke could not have left smoking even they were regretful, since they were prisoner of tobacco and this was another evil of smoking.

Third sub paragraph of the aforementioned matters was “Clothing”. The author had mentioned that clothing had been perceived mostly as ornament by women and women who have been wearing slender cloths were cold and were sick and he had also mentioned about dangers of girdle who had been used by women as “being pressed”⁵

It was required to wear cloths made from linen or cotton during summer times and cloths made from wool during winter times to be protected against hot and cold weathers. Men had worn fez, cap and women had worn crest to be protected against hot and cold weather.

It was suggested to wear less instead of layers of clothing. Inside the residences, it was required to keep rooms warm to feel warm. Outside the residences, it was required to wear coat, jumper not to get cold.

Cleaning of cloths was very important for health. Clothes should have been changed once in every week during winter times and three times in a week during summer times due to sweating. Body

cleaning was also important together with cleaning of clothes. For this reason, once in a week or at least once in every fifteen days, people should have bathed at home or at Turkish bath.

For foot health, shoes should have not been too tight because tight shoes have caused callus. Since weight of all body was concentrated over fingers, high heel shoes should have not been worn.

Forth sub paragraph of the aforementioned matters was “Working and Resting”. Human beings should have been working for this world and for the world after death. Works which were made for after death were worshipping and for worshipping, a health body was required. “Works for this world were art or occupations of the person. Some smart people have separated six hours of twenty four hours for sleeping, six hours of twenty four hours for worshipping, six hours of twenty four hours for working and six hours of twenty four hours for resting.

If ever a person had a health body, he/she could have worked as much as he/she wanted. Nevertheless, he/she had not exhausted himself/herself while working. Whenever he/she was tired, he/she should have spared a time to rest.

There were two types of working and resting according to the author. One was for body’s sedulity and fatigue and the other one was for mind’s sedulity and fatigue. For children, these two types of sedulity and fatigue were seen rarely. Nevertheless since they had no powerful minds and bodies as adults, they could not have resisted against sedulity and fatigue as much and as strong as adults. For this reason, it was required to entertain and rest children as adults.

Working fatigue of children is caused by their lessons. For this reason, if ever there are morning and afternoon lessons of children, there should have been resting time during noon. During these times, children should have played and had fun so their minds’ fatigues were ended.

While children were playing, their minds were getting rested but their bodies became tired so smart children did not play in a very harsh manner so they were not very sweaty. And whenever they were tired and had been sweaty, they did not sit at windy places or did not drink cold water.

Both being too much tired and being never tired made a person sick. According to the author, laziness was a reason of many illnesses. So, even a person did not have a regular job, he/she should have found some works to do.”⁵

At the conclusion part of the book Ahmet Mithat Efendi had mentioned that he had said the most significant subjects about health of children but there had been much more required to be followed for a healthy life. So he had mentioned that children should have listened very carefully the suggestions and recommendations of their parents and should have followed them as required. He also have mentioned

that if ever children did not listened to their parents they shall have lost their health and they shall have had a worse life. For example if a child jumping from a higher place did not listen to his/her parents words, he/she might have become permanently disabled due to laceration in groin.

RESULT

Ahmet Mithat Efendi had ended his book by the following sentence: “Children who do not listen to their parents always get hurt. Children who listen to their parents’ words never feel regret due to listening.”⁵ and most of opinions/recommendations of Ahmet Mithat Efendi are still valid after approximate 130 years. After we analyzed the book named *Health* of the author in an interdisciplinary manner, we stopped our work and we translated the book which had been written in a simple, understandable and conversation manner regarding the target audience of Ahmet Mithat Efendi from Ottoman Turkish to Latin words and submitted to attention of our current audience.

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“Health” Introduction

The most important blessing for human beings is health. “Health” does not only mean to be alive. But it mainly means “to live good”. If a human being becomes weak, disabled, lazy or diseased then it may be more correct to say for such a human being that he/she “is dragging his/her life” instead of “living his/her life”. Sick people go to doctors. If ever you keep your health n good manner, you do not need to go to doctors. There is no illness with no reason. If ever reason of this illness is not allowed then there shall be no illness. Person lives safe and sound until the end of his/her life.

Protecting the health is required for everybody from all ages. Especially for children, this is more important. Since children are more fragile and reasons of illnesses are more easy to emerge. In this book, we shall give many advices for children related with health. Which children follow these advices, they shall not get sick. They have powerful bodies and open minds.

“How Person Lives”

A person lives in a residence, eats and drinks, wears cloths, works and rests. So, for a person to live safe and sound, it is required to have first a place to accommodate, second things to eat and drink, third to have cloths to wear and forth to be able to work and rest and so it is required to follow advices given by doctors. Here we mention about these advices clearly to our children.

“Residence”

A place in which a person lives is called “residence”. Residences of people are located at villages and counties and provinces. Of course villages are better for health compared to provinces but working possibilities do not allow everybody to live in villages. Nevertheless, if our words about residences are heard then people may keep their health in good manner even in provinces and counties.

Residence of a human being should be located in wide and refreshing places. There are some districts at which houses are built closely spaced. Roads are so narrow that roofs of houses prevent you to see the sky. No sun or wind can enter to such districts. So houses at these districts can not be good for people.

If ever one side of houses is looking at wide street and the other side is looking at a wide garden, this is very good for health. Since air of places having forests is always refreshing and sun and wind is also entering such places and making these places good for health.

At narrow, dark, air free places, there is humidity and humidity causes many illnesses.

There should not be available garbage pile, midden, water accumulation or mud inside or around the residences. Smelling things are bad for health. It is very bad to have bad smelling toilets and kitchens.

Cleaning is very important for residences. The most important reason of illnesses is dirt and being uncleaned. So, women always pay attention to keep their residences clean. It makes sick all of the people if they are sleeping in the same room. Since their breaths pollutes the air of the room. If ever there are lots of people inside a room, air of the room is so polluted due to breaths that people have headaches. Such a polluted room may even cause illnesses with fever.

In order to prevent pollution inside the room, doors and windows of the room should be opened in the mornings and air inside should be refreshed. Even less people sleep in a room, still the air should be refreshed.

Rooms should not be kept very hot during winter seasons. If rooms are kept very hot, bodies of people living inside the room get used to this temperature and when they go outside, they get cold. Rooms should be kept in a temperature not too hot or not too cold.

If ever charcoal was used in heating the rooms, it should have been fired outside until it had become ashy then it should have been taken inside the room. Otherwise, poison inside less fired coal shall have been breathed inside lungs and shall have been caused headache and even death.

Another matter to be regarded besides the effects of the coal was heavily smelled flowers. These shall have never been kept inside especially bedrooms.

During summer times, when a person is sweaty, he/she should not sit in front of windows against wind. If he/she sits, then he/she becomes sick. But if there is no sweat over the body, there is no harm to sit in front of the window.

“Eat and Drink”

Eating and drinking is the most important thing, since a person can not live without eating and drinking. But if ever a person does not eat and drink properly, does not eat on proper times then this person becomes sick. He/she becomes even exhausted.

Some children eat too much but they are weak and thin. Old women say “Bread is staff of life” but if not eating and drinking properly then saying “Life is ended by eating” shall be more correct. Because eating and drinking in an improper manner causes illnesses.

Children should be fed four times a day. “Two of these should be main dinner/lunch and two of these should be breakfast. When children wake up in the morning, they should either dip the bread inside coffee and eat this bread or should eat bread together with olive or cheese. During noon, they should have lunch. During mid-afternoon, if the child is hungry, he/she should eat a piece of bread or simit. Second main meal should be dinner.

Families know required intervals in between meals and properly feed their children. For example if the child wakes up twelve o'clock in noon and breakfast is eaten at this time then lunch should be served at six o'clock in the afternoon. A piece of bread or simit is given to the child at nine thirty and dinner is served at twelve thirty in the night.

Some doctors mention that some of the foods are better and some of the food are not so good but we will not write these foods because everybody can not afford to buy these foods. The main thing is to digest the food and so make this food good for your body. Unless the food is digested, even the best foods shall not be useful for your body and also to eat strong food for the stomach may even causes harm.

Eating sweat foods sold outside such as pudding, sugar, fruit, halva is misbehavior and also not good for health. Because children do not think whether they are hungry or full when they are eating these sweat foods. But to eat sweat things when you are hungry is very bad for health. So if children having good manners want something to eat, they say this to their parents. Their parents buy these foods and give these foods in between the dinner or after dinner. Aforementioned foods which are eaten in mentioned order are not harmful and they are even good for health.

Totten fruits or carrion are very harmful for health. Especially some painted sugars, marsh mellows, sweetened fruit juices are even poisonous. Also eating ice cream when hungry or sweaty is very dangerous. For these reasons, children should not take and eat foods by themselves and should consume the foods allowed by their parents.

We shall say something to children about meal and this saying shall be very useful for them:

“Unless you are hungry, do not eat. When you eat, do not completely full your stomach and leave the table while you have still your appetite.”

Let me tell you the reason of this suggestion: Unless a person is hungry, he/she eats with no lust. Meal which is eaten with no lust does give damage instead of good. If ever stomach is completely full with meal, this causes problem for the person. Digestion becomes problematic. Since meal blows, grows, increases inside the stomach. If the person leaves the table while there is still appetite, when meal blows, stomach becomes completely full.

Until now, we only talked about the foods. Now let’s talk about drinking. Children do not want to drink anything but water. Some of the doctors say that wine is good and give advices to drink wine but wine becomes vinegar in stomachs of children and makes them sick.

There is no good from any one of grape beverages. But drinking of a small cup of coffee with no sugar after meal shall be good for digestion and drinking a good syrup one hour after meal shall be good to terminate the inside heat.

When we say “Drinking” we also thought about smoking. Cigarette is not a beverage but using it is named as “smoking” so let’s say some words for smoking also:

“Smoking”

Tobacco/cigarette is the most dangerous thing not only for children but also for adults. It is a terrible habit destroying beauty of women. Since smoking will resemble faces of women to dead people and will cause teeth decay and yellow teeth.

Tobacco is such a strong poison that when the ones who normally do not smoke wants to smoke once or twice they feel dizzy, nauseated and even exhausted.

Tastes of mouths and power of stomachs of smoking people will be decreased. So most of smoking people are thin and weak. There are many women suffering from tuberculosis due to smoking.

Have you ever seen tar inside a cigarette? This tar is inside bronchus and livers of smoking people. There is no even one benefit of smoking against all of these harms.

The ones who are used to smoke can not leave smoking even they are regretful, since they are prisoner of tobacco and this is another evil of smoking.

“Clothing”

Cloths have a great effect over health. Cloth is not just an ornament. If the cloth is worn only as an ornament then it has no benefit over health and it has harm over health. Because as is mostly seen, women wear such cloths that do not keep them warm and so they get cold. Also some women wear girdle to be seen thin and they tightly wrap themselves as being pressed in a machine. The problems related with girdle are so much that we can not finish them even we write them here one by one.

Cloth is used to protect person both from cold and hot weather. Men wear fez, cap and women wear crest to be protected against hot and cold weather. It is required to wear cloths made from linen or cotton during summer times and cloths made from wool during winter times to be protected against hot and cold weathers. However it is pointless to wear many layers of cloth in order to get warm during winter.

If a person wears layers of cloths, his/her body gets used to it and then starts to feel cold as before. As least cloth should be worn as possible. Also while living inside a room, it is better to warm the room instead of wearing lots of cloths one on each other. Outside the residences, it is required to wear coat, jumper not to get cold.

Cleaning of cloths was very important for health. All kinds of dirt are harmful for health but dirty clothes give real harm to the health of the person. Clothes should have been changed once in every week during winter times and two or three times in a week during summer times. Since during summer times, person sweats more and sweat makes clothes dirty.

The thing that makes clothes dirty comes from the body. These are cold “dirt” and “sweat” and they come from the body and penetrate into the cloths. Since first condition of health is cleaning then body cleaning is also important together with cleaning of clothes. For this reason, once in a week or at least once in every fifteen days, people should take a bath at home or at Turkish bath.

Shoes should not be too tight because tight shoes cause callus and this is a painful problem to get rid of. Since weight of all body is concentrated over fingers, high heel shoes should not be worn.

“Working and Resting”

Person is not born just for eating and drinking. He/she has lots of works to do for this world and for the world after death. Works which are made for after death are worshipping and for worshipping, a health body is required.

Works for this world are art or occupations of the person. Some smart people have separated six hours of twenty four hours for sleeping, six hours of twenty four hours for worshipping, six hours of twenty four hours for working and six hours of twenty four hours for resting.

If ever a person has a health body, he/she can work as much as he/she wants. Nevertheless, he/she should not exhaust himself/herself while working. Whenever he/she is tired, he/she should spared a time to rest.

There are two types of working and resting according to the author. One is for body’s sedulity and fatigue and the other one is for mind’s sedulity and fatigue. For children, these two types of sedulity and fatigue are seen rarely. Nevertheless since they have no powerful minds and bodies as adults, they can not resist against sedulity and fatigue as much and as strong as adults. For this reason, it is required to entertain and rest children as adults.

Working fatigue of children is caused by their lessons. For this reason, if ever there are morning and afternoon lessons of children, there should be resting time during noon. During these times, children should play and should have fun so their minds’ fatigues are ended.

While children are playing, their minds are getting rested but their bodies become tired so smart children do not play in a very harsh manner so they are not very sweaty. And whenever they are tired and are sweaty, they do not sit at windy places or do not drink cold water.

Both being too much tired and being never tired make a person sick. Laziness is a reason of many illnesses. So, even a person does not have a regular job, he/she should find some works to do.

“Conclusion”

In this book we said the most significant subjects about health of children but there are much more required to be followed for a healthy life. So if it is decided to write them all, there will be lots of books.

So we give the advice to children to listen their parents very carefully about the suggestions and recommendations of their parents about health matters and should follow these recommendations and suggestions as required. Health is the most important thing in life and if the children do not listen to their parents and if they get sick, shame on them.

For example whenever parents allow, children can play at proper places but if the ones seeing a child jumping from a higher place say “do not jump” and if he/she does not listen to them, most probably he/she may become permanently disabled due to laceration in groin.

Children who do not listen to their parents always get hurt. Children who listen to their parents’ words never feel regret due to listening.
