

Eco/Soc Topic 1

Breastfeeding vs. Baby Formula

The baby formula industry spends roughly 50 USD on every baby born worldwide. The majority of these marketing funds are directed at poor mothers, or at least mothers in poor countries. Many officials of these mostly African or East Asian countries have publicly opposed the practices of these companies, including Nestle, Abbott, Mead Johnson, and Danone.¹ The main means of exploitation of these companies is diffusing propaganda that baby formula is healthier than breastfeeding for an infant—despite many global studies saying otherwise. Another practice of these companies is disguising sales representatives as nurses in low-income countries and compelling mothers to give up breastfeeding for baby formula. Despite boycotts of these practices in past decades, many companies continue the use of these “milk nurses.” The most clandestine approach of these companies is lobbying to doctors and midwives to compel new mothers to prefer baby formula over breastfeeding.² Recently, Ecuador introduced a resolution urging to restrict these formula companies from spreading this fallacious propaganda, but the resolution was quickly withdrawn after threats of reduced aid and trade from the United States.³

Studies show that breastfeeding, even by sick or malnourished mothers, is linked to boosted maternal health and leads to babies with higher intelligence, lower rates of obesity and diabetes later on, and less diseases in general because of the presence of hormones and antibodies in breastmilk that are absent in baby formula. Baby formula has been linked to higher rate of infant death, especially in developing countries, where many mothers dilute the formula with unsafe water when they are low on supply.⁴ Regardless of the supposed adherence to the World Health Organization’s standards of these companies⁵, many countries argue that the main issue is that these companies are able to skirt these guidelines because poorer and weaker countries are unable to adequately monitor baby formula marketing practices due to the powerful lobbyists of this 70 billion dollar industry.⁶ Opposing countries argue that these formulas are meant to act as a supplement to breastfeeding, and they also argue that companies have a right to market and lobby as they please.⁷ So what, if anything, is to be done about these companies? Are they entitled to their right to market and lobby their product? Or should they be subject to regulation and World Health Organization standards?

¹ <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/breastfeeding-baby-formula-report/> (From 50 USD to end)

² <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/feb/27/formula-milk-companies-target-poor-mothers-breastfeeding> (All marketing practices)

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/08/health/world-health-breastfeeding-ecuador-trump.html>

⁴ <https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/7/10/17548028/trump-baby-formula-breastfeeding-mothers-health> (All Health Benefits)

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/feb/27/formula-milk-companies-target-poor-mothers-breastfeeding>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/08/health/world-health-breastfeeding-ecuador-trump.html>

⁷ <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/07/the-epic-battle-between-breast-milk-and-infant-formula-companies/564782/>

Eco/Soc Topic 2

Forced/Child Labor

Despite continuous efforts worldwide to minimize both forced and child labor, the practice continues to affect millions. Approximately 20.9 million people, including children, are victims of forced labor globally. They are trapped in jobs, usually with unsafe working conditions, which they were coerced or deceived into and cannot leave. Practically all areas of the globe participate in this illegal and immoral practice, with the Asian-Pacific region accounting for 11.7 million, Africa with 3.7 million, Latin America and the Caribbean with 1.8 million, Western Europe and the rest of North America with 1.5 million, the rest of Europe with 1.6 million, and the Middle East with 600,000. Moreover, an estimated 168 million children, 11% of the global child population, are in child labor, and 85 million of those are working in hazardous conditions which pose threats to their health, safety, and development.¹ Such conditions includes working from 16 to 23 hours a day to meet unrealistic quotas, leading workers to suffer from exhaustion, all for around \$2 USD a day.² Sweatshops range greatly in terms of safety and pay. In Honduras, a worker in a sweatshop can be paid \$14 USD a day while about 44% of the population is living off \$2 USD a day.³

These millions of people typically work in sweatshops, farms, or mines producing many common items such as carpets, cocoa, coal, diamonds, garments, rice, coffee, tobacco, sugar, cotton, and brick.⁴ Stopping these practices has proved difficult, for even though some of these workplaces flagrantly violate international labor laws, they are impossible to enforce because of the weak law enforcement structures in these typically developing countries. To exacerbate the problem, many countries that preach against these practices actually purchase the products created by them, which makes these workplaces even harder to eradicate due to their perceived necessity.⁵ However, many countries that house these operations argue that these workplaces actually benefit their workers, for without these factories, many workers would have no means of supporting themselves or their families, making any job better than no job. For example, more than 95% of surveyed Guatemalan sweatshop workers stated that they liked their jobs, and were unwilling to give up any amount of pay for improved conditions.⁶ And in Bangladesh, more than 77% of the population lives off less than \$2 a day, while the average Bangladeshi sweatshop worker earns more than that, thus being above the poverty line.⁷ Additionally, without this cheap labor, many products would not be able to be sold so cheaply, making it more difficult for lower-income citizens of other countries to purchase such products. So, what, if anything, is to be done about these workplaces? Should they be cracked down on for unsafe and forced working conditions? Or are they just workplaces that provide jobs for million? Are these workplaces necessary in a global economy that demands cheap goods?

¹ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@declaration/documents/publication/wcms_181953.pdf (From 20.9 million to end)

² <https://escholarship.org/content/qt2693m5pn/qt2693m5pn.pdf>

³ http://www.theworldcounts.com/counters/modern_day_slavery_facts/sweatshops_conditions

⁴ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/12/18/child-labor-products_n_798601.html?slideshow=true#gallery/15077/12

⁵ <https://escholarship.org/content/qt2693m5pn/qt2693m5pn.pdf> (From violation of labor laws to end)

⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2013/05/02/sweatshops-in-bangladesh-improve-the-lives-of-their-workers-and-boost-growth/#1e75b57374ce>

⁷ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2013/05/02/sweatshops-in-bangladesh-improve-the-lives-of-their-workers-and-boost-growth/#1e75b57374ce>

Eco/Soc Topic 3

Religious Persecution

Religious persecution is a serious issue that affects many people worldwide. An estimated 60% of nations suffer from compromised religious freedom, which includes discrimination, war tensions, and death¹. In 2014, religious minorities in 116 countries out of 196 countries faced religious threats by the majority in the area¹. Religious persecution is often executed by governments or extremist religious groups that have nationalist intentions in mind. Because secularism has been the basis of most governments in the modern area, some citizens feel as though the lack of religion in government symbolizes a lack of identity and nationalism¹. Because of the distrust in government, radical groups take power and often ignite war with the religious minority.

Religious persecution is proven to be more violent in areas with a significant number of young men, high unemployment, and land disputes³. The violence ranges from simple assault and battery to rape and torture, with children and young women often caught in the crossfire. Some countries have apostasy laws that penalize individuals for crimes committed against the name of God, where punishments range from fines to death². Developed nations also experience degrees of religious persecution such as limited church rights and imprisonment².

The most common religions involved in the disputes are Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism³. Christians experience persecution widely in the Middle East and Asia but often just leave the area. In the past ten years, $\frac{2}{3}$ of Christian people have either relocated to safer regions or have died². However, Christians do engage in the religious warfare and have destroyed many Islam-affiliated towns in Uganda, Afghanistan, and Bosnia¹. Due to the warfare, the United States has deemed some countries as CPCs (Countries of Particular Concerns) and restricted access⁴. However, the religious struggle is far from over.

Conflict within religions has also ravaged the world, such as the Sunni-Shiite Civil War between opposing Islam factions in the Middle East³. In Northern Ireland, religious disputes between Catholicism and Protestantism still persist and often end with a death toll³. The newly-elected President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, has ignited inner-Hinduism violence as well³.

The UN must now step in to take action against religious persecution. How should religion be addressed? Is it up to independent nations or is it a global issue? In the eyes of your government, what is the best method to protect your country?

Sources:

¹www.bbc.com/news/world-30001063

²www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/january/top-50-christian-persecution.html

³www.religioustolerance.org/curr_war.htm

⁴www.state.gov/j/drl/irf/c13003.htm