

The Social and Economic Conditions Relating to Health

Introduction:

The problems of the 20th century are for the most part inherited from the century before. In a number of cases these are problems that were either ignored or inadequately addressed by the authorities. Their attitude remains the same in this century. Their approach is still one of indifference as far as the masses are concerned.

Keep in mind that as the population expands so does the volume of problems.

Social Conditions

It is fair to argue that the MAIN problems experienced by the lower class in the 1920's and 1930's were: unemployment, poor living conditions, malnutrition and low wages.

Health

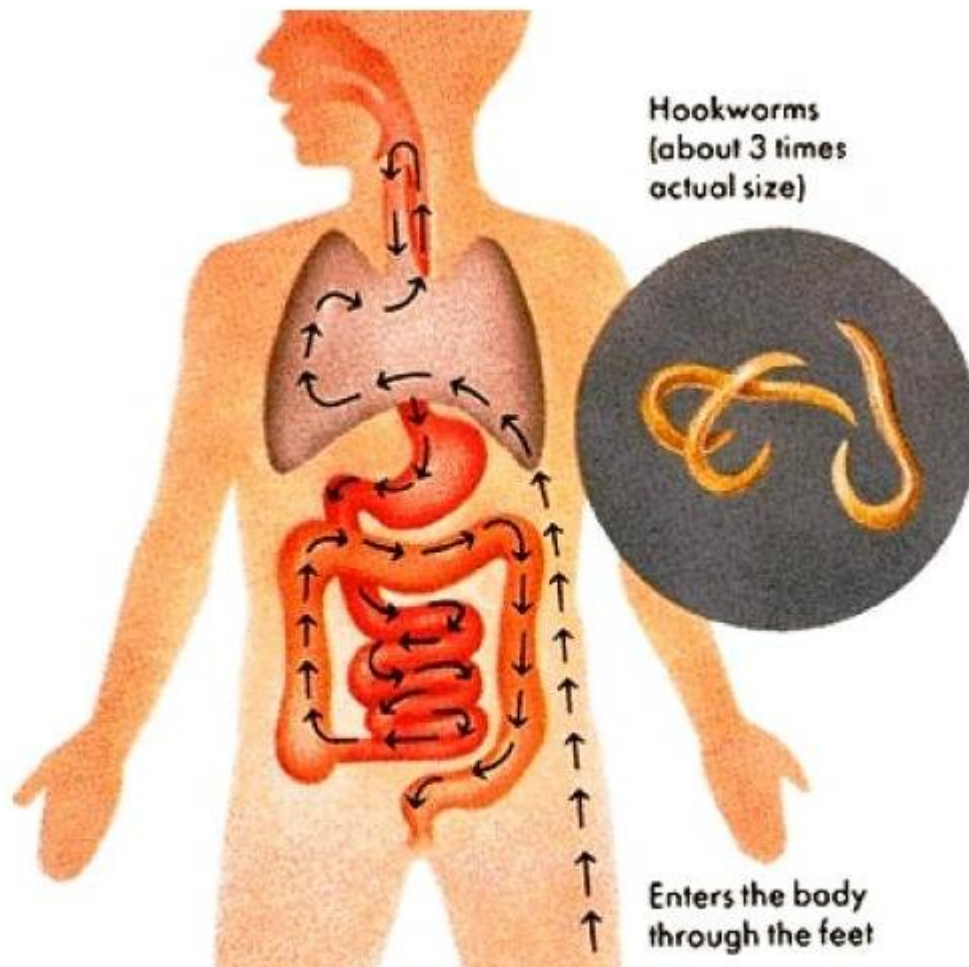
1. Malnutrition was prevalent. This was mainly due to the fact that the masses could not afford three meals a day or even one well balanced meal for the day. The majority of them had too many mouths to feed. They had to focus on quantity rather than nutritional value (quality). Their diet lacked most of the essential nutrients and vitamins required to build a healthy body. Statistics show that only 45% of the population in Jamaica was adequately nourished. Needless to say they had very little resistance to diseases.



Malnourished children

2. Diseases were rampant. The most common diseases were typhoid, yellow fever, malaria, dysentery, tetanus, hookworm, yaws and tuberculosis. In the

1930's up to 70% of the poor in the British West Indies suffered from hookworm while tuberculosis was responsible for 15% of all deaths.



Hookworm

3. There were very few trained doctors in relation to the size of the (ever growing) population. Many of them were not interested in attending to any member of the lower class. This was not only because they were prejudiced but also because the poor could not afford the fees. In addition most of the doctors were located in the towns, far removed from the deep rural districts and villages.

4. A number of them did their own doctoring. They used home remedies passed down from generation to generations. Here are some interesting examples: comfrey bush/leaf for headaches, eucalyptus bush or oil for cold, coconut water

for hypertension (high blood pressure) and sage tea for baby gripes.



Comfrey leaves

5. Some of the members of the lower class were very superstitious. They believed that forces of evil were responsible for illnesses. As a result they did not seek medical help but resorted to 'bush doctors' and obeahmen.

6. Poor sanitation helped to worsen the situation. There was a lack of running water and proper sewage facilities in most of the areas. Bathroom facilities were also limited and shared in the cases of tenement 'yards'. In some parts of the rural areas people still used the 'bush'. This helped to spread diseases. It did not help that they went mostly barefoot. Compounding the problem was those cases where the pit toilet or latrine was near to the kitchen, both being outside the main house.

7. There was a high infant mortality rate. 137 out of every 1000 infants did not live to see age one or two.

8. After World War 2 (1939-1945) international agencies such as World Health Organization (WHO) were formed. They made important advancements in the areas of eradication and prevention of diseases.

9. The establishment of the University Hospital of the West Indies provided an important training institution for doctors of the region.