

Increasing GDP Relevance and Usefulness in a Changing, Globalising World – Arguments for Measuring a Unique and Complex Food - Human Milk - in GDP

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Paper Abstract:

This paper addresses debates about the future beyond GDP, by arguing for the usefulness of measuring breastfeeding and human milk in GDP as an alternative indicator of population well-being, through experimental estimates within the System of National Accounts (SNA) framework.

As the S-S-F Commission acknowledged, human milk epitomizes how current assessment of economic activity which excludes non market production is biased, and can distort policy. It is clearly within the SNA production boundary, is quantitatively non-trivial and has important implications for public policy including health.

Here it is shown that focussing on breastfeeding fits within a capabilities framework and facilitates exploration of objective measures of quality of life that can be integrated with several key areas of concern about existing GDP measurement practices. Key focus areas are: time inputs to unpaid household production via breastfeeding, as an indicator of gender equity in work and well-being, and of policy recognition; human milk as valuable household food production in core GDP; unpaid household inputs into human capital formation via early life nutrition and care; negative externalities of breastmilk substitutes (such as health costs and environmental depreciation and depletion).