Recommendations to Increase Children’s Dietary Diversity and Decrease Sugary Snacks were Acceptable and Feasible for Mothers and Fathers in Tanzania

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BACKGROUND

- In the Lake Zone of Tanzania, there are high rates of stunting and anemia due to poverty, food insecurity, sub-optimal infant and young child feeding practices, and inequitable gender norms.
- Fathers are increasingly recognized as key influencers of infant feeding practices, but there is limited evidence of effective approaches to engage them.

OBJECTIVES

To inform the development of social and behavior change interventions for the Addressing Stunting Early in Tanzania (ASTUTE) project, we:

1. Assessed the acceptability and feasibility of complementary feeding recommendations among mothers and fathers in rural areas around Lake Victoria; and,
2. Explored fathers’ willingness to support and participate in complementary feeding.

METHODS

- Conducted Trials of Improved Practices with mothers and fathers of 6-18 month old children in 6 villages in 3 regions
- Purposive sampling based on access to lake, distance to town center, and socioeconomic status
- Focus group discussions with 60 mothers and fathers
- 50 mothers and 40 fathers completed household trials
- Transcripts were transcribed, translated, and analyzed using principles of grounded theory and Atlas.ti

RESULTS

- Children were fed thin, watery porridge with limited dietary diversity and received sugary snacks and drinks.
- Mothers were counseled to: (1) make porridge thick with other foods added to it; (2) give animal-source foods, legumes, and vegetables; (3) give fruit and vegetable snacks instead of biscuits, sugary snacks, and sweetened drinks; and (4) feed responsively.
- Fathers were counseled to: (1) buy nutrient-dense foods, (2) talk with wives about infant feeding and support optimal practices; (3) replace sugary snacks and drinks with healthy snacks; (4) help with other chores so wives have time to prepare special foods; and (5) participate in child feeding.

PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

- Complementary feeding recommendations that did not require additional food purchases were acceptable and feasible for families. Facility and community health workers should provide tailored counseling to parents to give thick porridge, add other foods to porridge, feed family foods, and give animal-source foods, if accessible.
- Household- and community-level activities can be used to engage fathers in complementary feeding. Fathers can buy food, participate in child care and feeding, and help with household chores.
- Increasing household support can improve intrahousehold allocation of resources, but additional strategies will be needed to address economic barriers.

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