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Food Security, Dietary Practices and Nutrition Status of Mothers/caregivers and Children in Laikipia County, Kenya

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Abstract

Food availability and access in the household determines the dietary practices and nutrition status of mothers and children. This study was conducted in Laikipia County; an arid and semi-arid region in Kenya, experiencing food insecurity and undernutrition. The study assessed household food security status and determined its relationship with dietary practices and nutrition status of mothers and children. Four villages were selected from vulnerable areas in the County, 152 children aged 6–59 months and their mothers/caregivers were randomly sampled. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on household food production and purchase, dietary diversity of mothers and children, and anthropometric measurements. The mean land size was 0.7 hectares and 55 %, 41 % and 33 % of the households grew staples/pulses, vegetables and fruits on-farm respectively, mostly for home consumption while 81 % kept livestock. The mean weekly expenditure on food was KES820±660 (mostly on starchy staples). The total amount of money spent weekly on food was significantly correlated with the mother's BMI ($r_s=0.166$) but not with the children nutrition status. Twenty eight percent of the children were stunted, 16 % underweight and 2 % wasted, while 16 % of the mothers were underweight, 52 % normal and 32 % overweight/obese. Sixty four percent of the caregivers did not achieve the minimum dietary diversity score of five food groups a day. Most commonly consumed food groups by caregivers were cereals (100 %), milk/milk products (79.6 %), dark green leafy vegetables (63.2 %) and other vegetables (67.8 %), only 30 % consumed a fruit. Cereals, oils/fats and milk/milk products were consumed by most children (≥ 80 %) but animal source foods such as eggs, meat and fish were consumed by <7 % of the children. The proportion of children who consumed vegetables was significantly higher (70 %) in households that cultivated vegetables than (48 %) those that did not ($p = 0.008$), while underweight was significantly ($p = 0.019$) higher among children from households that did not grow fruits. In conclusion, the dietary practices and nutrition status of mothers and children in Laikipia County are suboptimal and are influenced by household food access (purchases) and availability (production on-farm). Increased fruit and vegetable cultivation could enhance household food security, dietary practices and nutrition status.

Keywords: Food access, food groups, food production, minimum dietary diversity