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Determinants of Children’s Fruit Intake in Teso-South Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Inadequate child feeding practices remain a challenge in some sub-Saharan African countries despite various attempts to introduce age-appropriate diets. This study aims at identifying facilitating and hindering factors to improve the consumption of fruits among children in Western Kenya.

Trials of Improved practices (TIPs) were carried out from August-October 2019 in eight villages in Teso-South Sub-County, Kenya, targeting 53 households with children under eight years of age. The trials included three household visits with counselling to improve children’s diets and to negotiate to test household specific recommendations. Interview guides were used to capture experiences and perceptions of the improved practices. The responses were analysed by performing a structuring qualitative content analysis using QDA-Software.

Factors identified to facilitate fruit consumption among children included the availability of fruits or fruit seeds for planting, the influence and positive reactions of family members towards the practices, lifestyle and routines that enabled the mothers to be in charge herself as well as getting assistance. Further drivers were the perception of an easy implementation of the recommendation, the tastiness of the foods and the mother’s experience with positive outcomes like a sustained satiety of the child or an increased food intake. The factors mentioned to hinder fruit consumption were the unavailability of fruits, partly due to seasonality or financial constraints, child’s preferences, lifestyle and routines like time constraints or periods of sickness and perceptions towards the practices (unnecessary, not tasty). Unfavourable weather conditions, pests, and children uprooting seedlings hindered the planting of fruit trees within the homegardens.

The unavailability of fruits and the inability to plant (more) fruit trees were the main challenges to enhance fruit consumption among children. Field trials are needed with less focus on yield of staple crops but testing on how best fruit trees within homegardens and on farms can be included to enhance fruit availability throughout the year.

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