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Exploring sociocultural determinants of dietary behaviour among rural women of reproductive age in Amhara region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Women of reproductive age have specific nutritional requirements due to pregnancy and lactation. Little is known about the sociocultural determinants of dietary diversity among women of reproductive age. This study examines trends in dietary behaviour and the associated determinants of dietary diversity among women of reproductive age. A community-based cross-sectional study was conducted in 2019 in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. Using multistage systematic random sampling, the dietary diversity of $n = 421$ women of reproductive age was assessed by a 24-hour qualitative dietary recall. A descriptive analysis revealed characteristics of dietary behaviour and a chi-square test allowed identification of associated determinants of women's dietary diversity. It was found that only 26.8% of the women met the minimum dietary diversity score (MDD-W). The analysis, guided by the socio-ecological framework, showed that women's education, age, perception of nutritious diet, and frequency of consumption of animal-sourced foods, vegetables, and fruit were key determinants at the intrapersonal/individual level. Additionally, interpersonal/household level determinants such as, husbands' education, women's decision-making regarding food purchase/consumption, the family's actual eating occasion, and women's engagement in domestic and farming tasks were significantly associated with MDD-W. At the community level, access to clean water and especially cultural beliefs were significant determinants of MDD-W. Amharic proverbs and sayings prioritise men and strongly restrict women in food allocation. The majority (76.7%) of women of reproductive age practise frequent religious fasting, which relates to the institutional/national level. These findings underscore the need for a deeper examination of religious and cultural practices, to understand their impact not only on dietary diversity but also on women's lives.

Keywords: Dietary behaviour, dietary diversity, Ethiopia, sociodemographic and sociocultural determinants, women of reproductive age