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Food literacy: Novel strategy to address hidden hunger among women in rural and urban Tanzania

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Abstract

Micronutrient deficiencies affect adult population in Tanzania. Due to the increased nutrient demands and physiological nature, women of reproductive age (WRA) are more vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies. Despite the food production potential that Tanzania has, there is limited access to diverse and nutritious meals at household level. By fostering food literacy (FL), women can be empowered making healthy food choices, thus mitigating micronutrient deficiencies and breaking the malnutrition cycle. This study aimed at investigating the role of FL as a sustainable solution to combat hidden hunger among WRA in rural and urban Tanzania. A cross-sectional study was carried out involving 432 WRA from Mkuranga (rural) and Ilala (urban) districts in Tanzania. Data on FL, household dietary diversity (HDDS), dietary intake and socio-demographic characteristics was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire. Individual FL scores were categorised into three levels; excellent, sufficient, and limited. HDDS for 12 food groups was classified into three groups: low, medium, and high diversity. Individual dietary intake was estimated using 24-hours dietary recall. Information on FL were linked with HDDS and individual nutrient intake. Limited FL level was the highest (63.1 %), with urban exhibiting significant higher mean scores. The mean HDDS was 6.54 with a significant lower mean in the rural compared to urban households. About 76 % of households consumed high diversified foods. The mean daily iron, zinc, folate and vitamin A intake were 13mg, 7.84mg, 408.9μg and 669.84μg, respectively which were below the recommended dietary intake (RDI) except for folate. About 21 %, 38 %, 41 % and 35 % attained the RDI for iron, zinc, folate and vitamin A, respectively. Correlation analysis shows a significant and positive relationship between individual FL scores and HDDS. Women with excellent FL had significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher HDDS compared to those with other levels. However, there was no significant relationship between daily micronutrient intake with individual FL score ($p > 0.05$). These findings show low levels of FL and high HDDS however, high HDDS does not explain adequate dietary intake. FL is needed to increase competences that could have the potential to increase awareness to consume micronutrient-rich foods among WRA in rural and urban Tanzania.

Keywords: women of reproductive age, dietary diversity, food literacy, micronutrient deficiencies, rural, Tanzania, urban

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