

Health Facility-Based Counselling and Community Outreach are Associated with Improved Maternal Diet in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Background: Maternal diets contribute to the short, medium, and long-term well-being of mothers and children; however, practices related to improving maternal diet are sub-optimal. The reach of facility-based counselling and community outreach programmes on maternal diets is limited.

Methods: We examined baseline data from our stunting reduction project (ASTUTE) that included 5,000 primary caregivers in North-western Tanzania to understand the role of counselling and community outreach on women's dietary practices. We used chi-squares, t-tests, and ordered logistic regression to test these associations.

Results: Dietary practices among pregnant Tanzanian women are inadequate. Mothers rarely ate more food (8.0%) and more types of foods (7.1%) than usual during most recent pregnancy. Women rarely received facility counselling and community outreach on nutrition. Nutrition advice from any source was low before pregnancy (16.9%), during pregnancy (37.0%) and after giving birth (26.3%). Furthermore, 68% of mothers had never received health advice from community health workers (CHWs) (before and during pregnancy, and after giving birth).

Women who heard information about child health from a CHW (9.7%), versus 7.2% who did not, were significantly more likely to eat more during pregnancy and to have greater dietary diversity. Eleven percent of women who received counselling about maternal nutrition before pregnancy, versus 6.3% who did not, ate more types of foods ($p < .001$). There were significant differences between mothers who received advice on nutrition from any source and mothers who did not in terms of eating more and diverse foods. After adjusting for a range of sociodemographic variables, these associations did not persist except for advice on maternal nutrition during pregnancy.

Conclusion: Facility-based counselling and community outreach are promising strategies to improve dietary practices; however, more widespread counselling is needed for larger impact.

Recommendation: The Government and partners should strengthen policies and programs to increase mothers' access to facility counselling and community outreach to reduce maternal malnutrition.

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