Understanding Challenges and Opportunities for Improved Maternal Nutrition

Data from Qualitative Reports from Nine IYCN Countries

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Countries included in this review

• Côte d’Ivoire
• Ethiopia
• Ghana
• Haiti
• Kenya
• Lesotho
• Malawi
• Nigeria
• Zambia

• Data from maternal nutrition review for Zambia. Data on maternal nutrition for other countries as a part of larger IYCN research.

Photo: Kali Erickson
## Reviewed research reports

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Why is the focus on women critical for infant and young child feeding?

The mother is the center for enhancing most nutrition activities:

- As caretaker
- As food provider
- As navigator of cultural information
Programming realities

The mother is an important player, but generally her health is not the focus of infant and young child feeding behavior change activities.

“There is completely nothing, there is no support in the community (for mothers) unless you talk to them about their children”

Clinician, Zambia
Perception that maternal nutrition/health is related to infant and young child feeding

“Mothers who are not well nourished cannot provide adequate breastmilk for their babies – in both the quality and the quantity of the milk.”

Community health worker, Haiti

“The mother’s own health and wellbeing are important in being able to properly care for her children”

Father’s focus group, Haiti

“If a woman is not eating enough so she cannot breastfeed exclusively for six months.”

Father, Ethiopia
Health staff engagement with women

- Marginal focus on maternal nutrition
- Health staff feel the need to convey too much information at a time

“There is no support for pregnant women, only if you have HIV”
Community health worker, Zambia

“Local women are not always interested in hearing us talk….they may be more interested in visual materials”
Health worker, Zambia

Photo: Tina Koanga
Health staff engagement with women

- Focused on technical information not counseling
- IYCN has made significant improvements to incorporate counseling training within its nutrition education

“What is given in the clinic is the theoretical part, but there is a need for the practical part”

Community leader, Zambia
Household environment for women

- Grandmothers provide critical information on mother and child feeding and care

- They have a significant role as frontline caregivers and providers of nutritional advice

*Grandmothers were open to learning ‘modern’ information about health, nutrition and HIV”*

*Community health worker, Kenya*
Household environment for women

- Fathers have a critical role to support their wives and children.
- While not generally interested in ‘women affairs’ they expressed a desire to learn and be more active.
- Nigeria recommended communications messages be given to different populations:
  - Grandmothers
  - Mothers
  - Fathers
  - Health center personnel.

Photo: Evelyn Hockstein
Other household challenges

• Women’s work load

“We hardly have time to rest. Even now I am dozing. I wake up at 5am and my responsibilities are just too much, and most of the time, I have no one to assist me”

Mother, Kenya

• Women’s diets do not change significantly with pregnancy

• Poverty

“These women are not able to sustain themselves due to lack of money even though they may have knowledge from us”

Community health worker, Zambia
Opportunities for change at the community level

• Health service providers should focus on counseling women with individual relevant information

• Integration of nutritional information
  ➢ Family planning
  ➢ Micro-business
  ➢ Agriculture (home gardens)

• Need for follow up at the household
Opportunities for change at the household level

- Reduced work load
- Facilitate dietary adequacy (quantity and variety)
  - Home gardens
  - Increasing income
  - Reduce or eliminate foods from vendors
- Include key household members (grandmothers and husbands)
- Facilitate appropriate health seeking
Opportunities for change at the individual level

- Women’s groups
- Health communications should be context specific and relevant
- Focus on empowerment (human agency)
- Examine and monitor change

Photo: Oluseyi Akintola