

Chapter 17

Nutrition and Food Security Status of East African Women in the Wetlands of Lake Victoria Basin: The Role of African Universities in Improving Maternal Health

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Abstract

The Lake Victoria Basin is facing environmental and socio-economic problems that have led to escalating poverty and poor health among women. This research study was carried out to determine the food consumption patterns, nutrient intakes and nutritional status of women in the Lake Victoria Basin. A sample 612 women in Kisumu (Kenya, 206), Mwanza (Tanzania, 201) and Jinja (Uganda, 205) were studied. Data were collected through an interview schedule, anthropometry, dietary and biochemical indices. The Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) analyzed data for descriptive statistics, chi-square and ANOVA. Various relevant computer databases were used to analyze data. The result of the study showed that women's diets were deficient in both macronutrients and micronutrients. Women's diets were highly carbohydrates in nature. Women's food tastes had changed from traditional to exotic foods. Seventy five percent of the women were malnourished using the BMI values. About 10.9% of the lactating and non-lactating women were underweight. Sixty one percent of the women were anemic with a higher percentage among pregnant in all the countries at 90.3%, 86.7% and 76.5% in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda respectively. Overall 43.2% of the women had low iron storage levels. The prevalence of acute and moderate vitamin A deficiency as measured by serum retinol was 4.7% and 37.4% respectively. The study's conclusions were that micronutrient deficiency is a great problem in the Lake Basin of Lake Victoria. The Universities of East African countries can play a key role in improving maternal health through provision of hard data on ideal food vehicles for food fortification and generation of viable food supplementation programs to alleviate both macro and micro nutrient deficiencies. Designing and implementation of appropriate and relevant training materials on nutrition education can go a long way in improving women's nutritional status and universities have the capacities to play such a role.

Introduction

Every year more than 500,000 women worldwide die from complications arising from pregnancy and child birth (WHO/ UNICEF/ UNFPA, 2000). Maternal malnutrition is associated with both maternal morbidity and mortality in several ways. Maternal stunting is associated with small birth canal and obstructed labour, which is a main cause of maternal mortality (Konje and Ladipo, 2000). There is substantial evidence relating low birth-weight and intrauterine growth retardation to maternal under nutrition (Fishmen et al 2004). Micronutrient deficiencies have adverse effects on the mother, such as anemia, hypertension, complication of labour and even death (Ramakrishnom et al, 1999). This paper discusses the findings of a study on maternal nutrition and food security status and the role of African universities in the attainment of optimal maternal health.