

HAFL Master's Thesis Abstract

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English Title:

Determinants of stunting in Zambian children

How intra-household dynamics determine infant and young child feeding practices in Zambia

English Summary:

Background and objective: Stunting rates remain unacceptably high in Africa. Even though intervention programs against malnutrition have been implemented, the prevalence of stunting only declined by 10% in sub-Saharan Africa between 2000 and 2019. Around 40.1% of children under five suffer from stunted growth in Zambia. Inadequate Infant and Young Child Feeding practices are pronounced as a determinant of stunting. In recent years, intra-household dynamics and the influence on the nutrition of household members have been the subject of discussion. However, studies about the role of intra-household dynamics in a child's nutrition are scarce in number. Thus, the study aimed to collect baseline information about how intra-household dynamics determine breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices in the Zambian context.

Methods: The study was conducted in Zambia between May and June 2022. Two communities each in Ndola, Luapula Province, and Mansa, Copperbelt Province, were selected based on stunting prevalence. Six focus group discussions were conducted with mothers and fathers, focusing on intra-household dynamics. In addition, 50 in-depth interviews were conducted with mothers of children aged 0-24 months to obtain information on breastfeeding and complementary feeding. A total of 88 participants took part in the study.

Results: Marriage fundamentally determined the household composition. The gender-specific distribution of roles dominated the intra-household dynamic. A mother is primarily responsible for household tasks and childcare, and the father is for the provision of money. Both spouses make joint decisions about income, whilst the mother has the decision-making power about infant and young child feeding.

The practice of exclusive breastfeeding for up to six months was 68%. At an average age of 5.4 months, complementary foods such as porridge and *nshima* were introduced. Most children were weaned at 18 months. Only 8% of the mothers followed the recommendations to breastfeed their child until the age of two years.



Conclusion: This study addressed baseline information and knowledge about how intra-household dynamics determine young infant and child feeding in Zambia.

Traditional patterns impact intra-household dynamics and mainly affects infant and young child feeding after the child's age of six months. Hence, the focus should be on the early introduction phase of monotonous complementary feeding. Fathers are interested in supporting activities to diversify their children's diets. Therefore, the father's role in child nutrition should be considered when developing interventions to combat malnutrition and stunting.

Supportive might be a social shift that tolerates the acceptance of a task distribution different from the previous tradition. The results suggest that nutritional education could improve fathers' commitment and might benefit the diversity of a child's diet.

Keywords:

Intra-household dynamics; breastfeeding; complementary feeding; Zambia

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