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Title:

Community perceptions of early infant feeding recommendations in Windhoek, Namibia: A Social and Behaviour Change perspective

Key words:

Infant feeding, IYCF, Social and Behaviour Change, Namibia, breastfeeding

Institutions:

Master's thesis, Charité Universitätsmedizin, Institute of Tropical Medicine and International Health, supervised by Stefanie Theuring

Abstract:

Sub-optimal feeding practices persist in many developing countries and are an important reason underlying infant morbidity and mortality. Despite substantial efforts to promote improved infant and young child feeding practices, the adoption of recommended behaviours remains low in most countries, including those in sub-Saharan Africa. Underlying reasons have been documented in a number of settings, but many are sensitive to specific local contexts. This qualitative study conducted focus group discussions and individual interviews with 42 recent mothers and grandmothers in the urban and multi-cultural setting of Windhoek, Namibia. It examined perceptions on early infant feeding recommendations among these key audiences through a social and behaviour change lens and with a specific focus on the role of risk perceptions in decision making.

Despite substantial knowledge on infant feeding recommendations, the study identifies a number of gaps in understanding and awareness. Dissemination of IYCF messages relies heavily on the health sector and almost exclusively targets mothers. Also, there were a number of barriers to the adoption of selected recommended behaviours at motivational, skills/self-efficacy and environmental levels. Many of the identified factors are consistent with findings from similar research in the Southern African region. In the face of substantial structural barriers, an increase in risk perceptions is not seen as promising.

Finally, the study discusses opportunities for future promotion of early infant feeding promotion to benefit from multi-level and multi-channel social and behaviour change approaches that would increase reach with important facilitating audiences and beyond the health facility level.