



## Complementary feeding practices and nutritional status of children 6-23 months in Kitui County, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

*Objectives:* Inappropriate complementary feeding practices among children aged 6-23 months is major cause of under nutrition. There is scarce information on the relationship between complementary feeding practices and nutritional status. This study aimed to determine the factors contributing to the complementary feeding practices and the nutritional status of children aged 6 -23 months.

*Methodology and Results:* A randomly selected sample of 201 children aged 6-23 months was investigated using a cross sectional analytical design in four randomly selected sub-counties in Kitui County. Data were analyzed using ENA for SMART for nutrition status, Nutri-survey for dietary intake and SPSS. Results showed that most caregivers (70.6%) had attained primary level education. Majority of respondents (69.2%) had low levels of income. The average number of meals consumed per day was  $4.1 \pm 0.01$ . The main foods consumed were carbohydrates with little consumption of fruits and vegetables. The levels of wasting, stunting and underweight were 7.0%, 22.9% and 10.9%, respectively.

*Conclusions and application of findings:* The complementary feeding practices were inadequate to meet the macronutrient and micronutrients needs of the children. The foods lacked variety, children took fewer meals per day and key foods were consumed less frequently than expected. The low food production in the semi- arid area coupled with low income could be associated with the food insecurity and consequently to the quality, quantity and diversity of the foods consumed by the children. The levels of malnutrition were relatively high for these children aged 6-23 months and this could be attributed to food insecurity indicated by low dietary diversity. The study noted a significant relationship between complementary feeding practices and nutritional status. The study recommends use of locally available, affordable and variety of foods to improve nutrient content of complementary foods. The study recommends agricultural interventions to enhance the nutritional content of complementary foods. Nutrition education on appropriate Infant and Young Child Feeding among mothers is essential.

**Key words:** Complementary feeding practices, Nutritional status, children under 6-23 months