

"We pass out information with doubts on our faces": Training nutrition counselors in infant and young child feeding

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Abstract Text:

Background: In 2012 the World Health Assembly endorsed a Comprehensive Implementation Plan on Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition. To help communities achieve the six global nutrition targets, WHO outlined 5 priority actions, one of which designated increasing human resources to implement nutrition interventions. Since 2007, the Cameroon Baptist Convention Health Services (CBCHS) has sought to train and integrate a cadre of nutrition counselors into prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV programs, infant welfare clinics, and antenatal clinics to improve infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices.

Study Objective: Explore the acceptability of IYCF counseling among caregivers and nutrition counselors.

Data Collection: Focus group discussions (FGDs) with 4 groups of breastfeeding women (2 rural, 2 urban, N=47) and 2 nutrition counselors (N=19).

Methods: Using qualitative inductive content analysis, all of the FGDs were coded, categorized for themes, and checked for inter-consistency.

Results: Three themes emerged that influence acceptability of infant feeding counseling: respect for nutrition counselor, positive experience with following advice, and importance of training. Caregivers respect nutrition counselors and those that followed their advice saw healthy outcomes in their children. Nutrition counselors expressed the need for further training and lacked confidence in their counseling skills.

Conclusion: Training a cadre of nutrition counselors is one approach towards increasing human resources to implement nutrition interventions and IYCF counseling provided by nutrition counselors is perceived as acceptable among caregivers. Future trainings of nutrition counselors should include role modeling to build confidence in nutrition counseling.