

Factors affecting food selection, intake and nutritional status of the elderly in Mathare slums of Nairobi Kenya

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Abstract:

This study was conducted to investigate factors that affect food selection, intake and the nutritional status of the elderly in Mathare slums of Nairobi Kenya. The major objectives for this study were: to determine the nutritional status of the elderly in Mathare slums; to determine the food preferences, satisfaction/dissatisfaction with foods available in the market for the elderly in Mathare slums; to determine factors that influence food selection among the elderly in Mathare slums; to investigate the nutritional knowledge of the elderly in Mathare slums, and to establish the dietary intake of the elderly in Mathare slums. Data were collected using an interview schedule administered on a sample of 90 elderly people, aged 55 years and above and living in Mathare slums, between April and June, 2001. Anthropometric measurements, such as height, weight, armspan and MUAC were taken. A food frequency questionnaire was administered to assess the dietary intake of the respondents. Data were analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) for frequencies and percentages. Anthropometric data were analyzed using BMI cut-off point of 18.5kg/m² for underweight and MUAC cut-off points of 22cm for women and 23cm for men. The study composed of 57 (63%) men and 33 (37%) women. The most represented age group was 55-59 years. Most respondents were married and had at least some primary education. Forty one percent of the respondents had 4-6 dependants on their income. The elderly did not score well on the items on nutritional knowledge and therefore can be said not to be nutritionally knowledgeable. The physiological factors that affected their food selection and intake were dental problems, loss of taste and appetite and chronic diseases and 90% of them reported loss of weight. The psychological factors that affected food choices were loneliness and bereavement. The socio-economic factors that had most influence on the respondents' choices were income, cost of food, place where the food was bought, the cooking facilities available and the means of transport to the market place. Eighty seven percent of elderly were satisfied with the foods available in the market for their use though they expressed a need for some specific modifications like reduction of prices, providing variety and improving the standards of hygiene. Thirty eight percent of respondents ate vegetables and cereals because of lack of money. The nutritional status of the elderly in Mathare was generally fair though 31% were underweight using BMI whereas 21% were malnourished using MUAC standards. Using a food frequency questionnaire, the dietary intake of the elderly in Mathare can be said to be high in cereals, low in animal foods and medium in vegetables and fruits.