

Primary schools can be a viable platform for improving dietary diversity and meal frequency among adolescent girls

How primary school girls were empowered to improve their dietary practices: Lessons learned from a successful program in Ethiopia

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Background

Scalable interventions to improve the nutrition of adolescent girls are urgently needed in LMICs but have not been rigorously tested or documented. In Ethiopia, the high level of girls attending schools provide an opportunity to scale up nutrition.

Objective

The program tested the feasibility of school-based nutrition education interventions to improve dietary diversity, meal frequency, and healthy food choices among adolescent girls in two regions of Ethiopia.

Methods

Baseline surveys of adolescent girls, parents, and teachers were used to identify the main influencers of adolescents' dietary practices and the contact points where they could be reached. Selected nutrition messages based on national guidelines for adolescent nutrition were integrated into six school activities, including: daily flag ceremonies, classroom Q&A discussions, student clubs, peer group mentoring sessions, body mass index (BMI) monitoring and counseling sessions, and parent education by teachers and adolescent girls. Job aids, including the nutrition passport (shown in figure 2) were developed, and extensively tested in each region for comprehension, appeal, motivation, and user preferences.

Results

After implementing the nutrition education activities, most girls in intervention areas had heard key messages (Figure 2); adolescent girls consumed more food groups (Figure 3), and more meals (Figure 4). The percent of adolescent girls who recalled nutrition messages received from different contact points in school varied (Figure 1); the combined impact on dietary improvements was significant.

Conclusion

Primary schools can be effective platforms for scaled up nutrition programs for adolescents if they are designed according to social and behavior change principles including engagement of influential persons, use of multiple channels, and empowering adolescents to determine their dietary practices.



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Adolescents in the SNNP region of Ethiopia use their nutrition passports during peer mentor group sessions. The program reached adolescent girls, age 10-14, through a diverse range of activities.

PROGRAM LOCATION

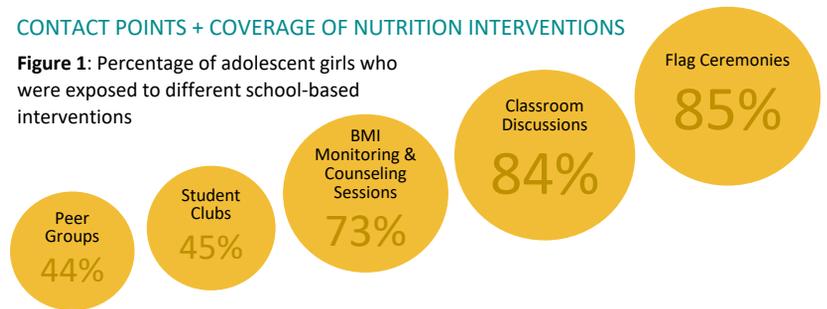


NUTRITION INDICATORS



CONTACT POINTS + COVERAGE OF NUTRITION INTERVENTIONS

Figure 1: Percentage of adolescent girls who were exposed to different school-based interventions



RECALL OF NUTRITION MESSAGES

Figure 2: Percentage of adolescent girls who had heard key messages



IMPACT ON NUTRITION OUTCOMES

Figure 3: Number of food groups consumed by adolescent girls



Figure 4: Daily meal frequency the last day of school

