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Home management of diarrhea among underfives in a rural community in Kenya: household perceptions and practices.

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION: Diarrheal disease is a major cause of morbidity and mortality among under-fives especially in rural and peri-urban communities in developing countries. Home management of diarrhea is one of the key household practices targeted for enhancement in the Community Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (C-IMCI) strategy.

OBJECTIVE: The aim of this study was to determine the perceptions of mothers/caregivers regarding the causes of diarrhea among under-fives and how it was managed in the home before seeking help from Community Health Workers or health facilities.

DESIGN: A household longitudinal study was conducted in Nyando district, Kenya in 2004-2006 adopting both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

SUBJECTS: A total of 927 mothers/caregivers of under-fives participated in the study.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES: Perceived causes of childhood diarrhoea, action taken during diarrhea, fluid intake, recognition of signs of dehydration, feeding during convalescence, adherence to treatment and advice.

RESULTS: Majority of the respondents 807 (87.1%) reported that their children had suffered from diarrhea within the last 2 weeks before commencement of the study. Diarrhea was found to contribute to 48% of child mortality in the study area. Perceived causes of diarrhea were: unclean water 524 (55.6%), contaminated food 508 (54.9%), bad eye 464 (50.0%), false teeth 423 (45.6%) and breast milk 331 (35.8%). More than 70% of mothers decreased fluid intake during diarrhea episodes. The mothers perceived wheat flour, rice water and selected herbs as anti-diarrheal agents. During illness, 239 (27.8%) of the children were reported not to have drunk any fluids at all, 487 (52.5%) drunk much less and only 93 (10.0%) were reported to have drunk more than usual. A significant 831 (89.6%) withheld milk including breast milk with the notion that it enhanced diarrhea.

CONCLUSION: Based on these findings, there is need to develop and implement interactive communication strategies for the health workers and mothers to address perceptions and misconceptions and facilitate positive change in the household practice on management of diarrhea among under-fives.

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MeSH Terms

LinkOut - more resources