

Perceptions towards management of acute malnutrition by community health volunteers in northern Kenya.

Elizabeth Wambui¹, Calistus Wilunda¹, Hermann Pythagore Pierre Donfouet^{1,2}, Bonventure Mwangi¹, Tadesse Alemu Zerfu^{1,3}, Tewoldeberha Daniel⁴, Olivia Agutu⁵, Betty Samburu⁶, Daniel Kavoo⁶, Lydia Karimurio⁶, Pilar Charle Cuellar⁷, Emily Keane⁸, Lilly Schofield⁸, James Njiru⁹, Martin Chabi¹⁰, Lucy Gathigi Maina⁵, Peter Okoth⁵, Judith Raburu⁵, Grace Gichohi⁶, Alex Mutua⁶, Charles Matanda⁶, Elizabeth Kimani-Murage¹

¹African Population and Health Research Center, P.O. Box 10787-00100, APHRC Campus, Nairobi, Kenya

²The World Bank Health Nutrition and Population Global Practice, Washington, USA.

³International Food Policy Research Institute, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

⁴UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, Nairobi, Kenya

⁵UNICEF Kenya County Office, Nairobi, Kenya

⁶Ministry of Health, Nairobi, Kenya

⁷Action Against Hunger, London, United Kingdom

⁸Save the Children UK, London, United Kingdom

⁹Save the Children International, Nairobi, Kenya.

¹⁰World Health Organization, Kenya Country Office, Nairobi Kenya

¹Corresponding Author Email: emwaniki@aphrc.org

Abstract

Child undernutrition is a persistent challenge in arid and semi-arid areas due to low and erratic rainfall, recurrent droughts and food insecurity. In these settings, caregivers face several challenges in accessing health services for sick and/or malnourished children, including long distances to health facilities, harsh terrain, and lack of money to pay for transportation costs to the health facilities, leading to low service coverage and sub-optimal treatment outcomes. To address these challenges and optimize treatment outcomes, the World Health Organization recommends utilizing community health volunteers (CHVs) to manage acute malnutrition in the community. This study explored the perceptions of community members regarding acute malnutrition treatment by CHVs in Turkana and Isiolo counties in Kenya. The study utilized a cross-sectional study design and included a purposive sample of caregivers of children, CHVs, officers who trained and supervised CHVs and community leaders in the intervention area. Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were used to explore perceptions towards the management of acute malnutrition by CHVs. Generally, caregivers and CHVs perceived the intervention to be beneficial as it readily addressed acute malnutrition treatment needs in the community. The intervention was perceived to be acceptable, effective, and easily accessible. The community health structure provided a platform for commodity supply and management and CHV support supervision. This was a major enabler in implementing the intervention. The intervention faced operational and systemic challenges that should be considered before scale-up.

Keywords: community health volunteers, community management of acute malnutrition, integrated community case management, acute malnutrition, wasting.